

15 HUGE REVIEWS Baldur's Gate II • NHL 2001
Crimson Skies • Metal Gear Solid

HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE
20 GAMER GIFTS
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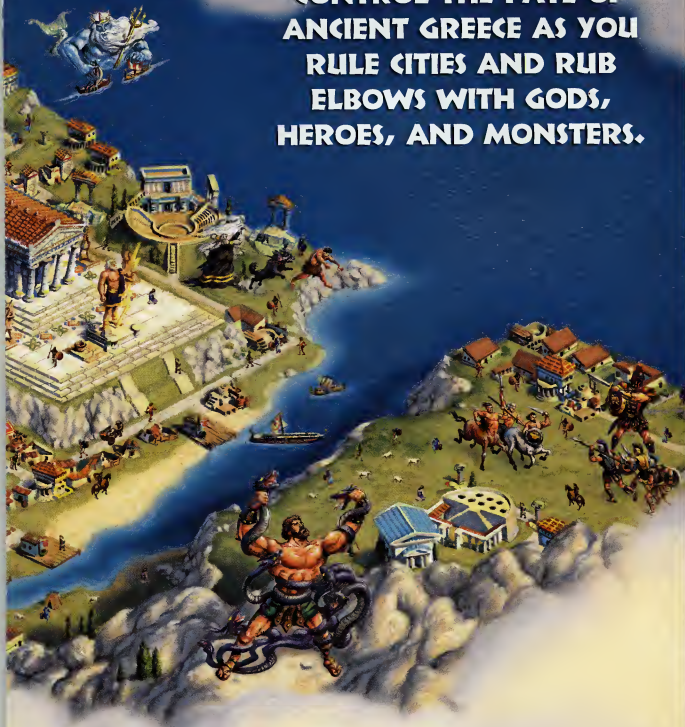
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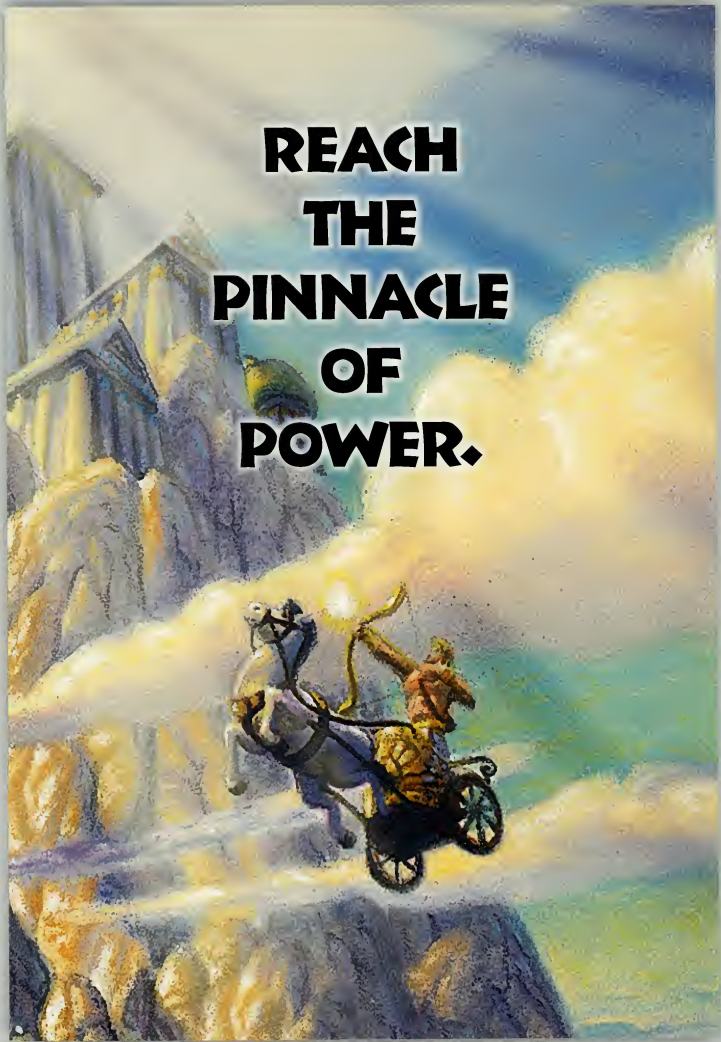
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PC GAMER

VOLUME 7 • NUMBER 12 • DECEMBER 2000

Cover Story

WEB WORLD WAR

64 Massively multiplayer online games are maturing with every successive release. We take a look at some of the most promising and ambitious games in this hot new genre, including a mammoth world exclusive on *Planetside*, the world's first massively multiplayer first-person shooter, from the creators of *EverQuest*. We've also got the latest scoop on *Anarchy Online*, *Ultima Worlds Online: Origin*, *Shadowbane*, and more, including rumors and speculation on other hot properties in development.

Features

116 **The Holiday Gift Guide**
Christmas already? Don't panic; the PCG staff has put together the ultimate holiday gift guide for gamers. Whether you're buying for a loved one or making a list for yourself, be sure to check out our collection of the greatest must-have gifts.

Scoops

12 **WORLD EXCLUSIVE!**
Majestic

You don't just play this game, it plays you. Electronic Arts is about to change the definition of "gaming."

20 **High Heat 2002**
Another year, another kick-ass High Heat baseball game. We find out if it's possible for 3DO to make their amazing sim any better.



23 **Microsoft Train Simulator**
The world of trains, according to Microsoft. Set up railways, dominate the competition, and get in trouble with the Federal Trade Commission.

24 **IL-2 Sturmovik**
Finally, a flight sim that lets you test your mettle on the Eastern Front with Russia's premiere fighter/bomber, the IL-2 Sturmovik.

28 **Dragon's Lair 3D**
The famous and classic animated adventure game comes to the PC and gets the full 3D treatment. Princess Daphne never looked better.

30 **Mafia: La Cosa Nostra**
The makers of *Hidden & Dangerous* take on the mob, and are putting you in the shoes of a street hood looking to become a made man.



Star Trek Voyager Elite Force, p.138

Reviews

- | | |
|--|--|
| 146 Baldur's Gate II: The Shadows of Amn | 172 Rally Masters |
| 160 Crimson Skies | 171 Reach for the Stars! |
| 169 The Dukes of Hazzard: Racing for Home | 170 Steel Beasts |
| 138 Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force | 174 Superbike 2001 |
| 156 Metal Gear Solid | 173 Who Wants to Beat Up a Millionaire? |
| 168 Midtown Madness 2 | 144 Wizards & Warriors |
| 145 NASCAR Heat | |
| 158 NHL 2001 | |
| 167 Panzer General III: Scorched Earth | |



Crimson Skies, p.167

Strategy

Strategy Central

Baldur's Gate II is finally out! Check out the first half of our monstrous full walkthrough. Also, don't forget to check out the strategies for *Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force*, one of the best first-person shooters ever.

- 226 **Baldur's Gate II: The Shadows of Amn**
- 244 **Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force**



Baldur's Gate II: The Shadows of Amn, p.226

The Hard Stuff

185 That Vederman character is at it again. This time he's reviewing a set of laptops from Dell, Microsoft's new force feedback joystick, the Creative Labs GeForce 2 Ultra, and the latest sound card from Turtle Beach. And you can't miss the Ved's latest rants and raves in Tech Q&A.



Hardware and software reviews, p.185

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Departments

- 8 **Disc Pages**
This month, the one and only Jeremy Williams has put together yet another great demo disc. Be sure to check out NHL 2001.
- 38 **Eyewitness**
Why is Verant sending lawyers at the creator of a little program called *EverQuest Macros*? Check out our in-depth story as we get to the core of their no-nonsense policy against third-party software. And don't miss part two of our "Where are they now?" story as we catch up with Game God Steve Meretzky and *Space Quest's* Scott Murphy. All this and a chance to win copies of *Diablo II* and *Baldur's Gate 2*.
- 206 **Extended Play**
Dan discovers the joys of the *Firearms* mod for *Half-Life* and decides that the pros of the industry could learn a thing or two from the amateurs out there.
- 208 **The Point After**
Smoke takes a look at statistics and realism and finds that there's still room for improvement in PC sports games.

- 213 **The Killing Box**
What does the coming of X-Box mean to us PC gamers? Colin ponders the conundrum.
- 214 **Alternate Lives**
Shareware RPGs have Wolf convinced that good gaming doesn't need to cost \$50.
- 217 **The Desktop General**
Our Colonel visits Shrapnel Games and is reminded that sometimes, smaller is better.
- 218 **Sim Column**
Find out why Mahood is still playing *Falcon 4.0* and *Grand Prix Legends*.

- 250 **Letters**
You send it to us, we print it. Find out what fellow readers are spouting about.
- 256 **Backspace**
Chris Taylor of Gas Powered Games tackles our questionnaire, and we love him for it.

LETTER FROM THE ED.



"You've never seen me panic. When I panic, I make this face."

Whenever we ask our Backspace interviewees whether online gaming is a fad or the inexorable future of our industry, the answer is always the same. It's the future — no doubt about it. The shape, format, and business model of that future are still up for grabs, but the games are already ambitious and intriguing. This month, we preview a vast range of these options, which should help you decide where your future online gaming dollar is going.

Also in this issue is the annual gift guide — all the goodies a gamer could want, wrapped in a wonderful parable of gaming greed gone wrong. It's not to be missed.

And here's the hardest part of this month's column: bidding a fond farewell to our erstwhile Managing Editor, Lisa Renninger. After five incredible years steering the PC Gamer ship through its monthly production cycle, Lisa is heading to Chicago, where buying a house is not an impossible dream (unlike the Bay Area). Her contribution to PC Gamer's success over this time has been incalculable. A rock of consistency in the rough sea of deadlines and procrastinating editors, Lisa will be sorely missed by everyone at the mag, and by Imagine Media in general. So, Lisa, thanks from all of us for all you've done, and our very best wishes for the future.

And finally, the movie quote contest. So *All the President's Men* was not as hard as I thought it might be. Multiple winners this month, so congratulations to Chris VanGompel (for song), Zach Thompson for narrative, and Mark Balzer (busted!). As usual, entries go to ednote@pcgamer.com.

Rob Smith

Rob Smith,
Editor-in-Chief

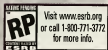


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FROM RICK GOODMAN
LEAD DESIGNER, AGE OF EMPIRES®

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I SEE POLYGONAL PEOPLE

MY SIXTH SENSE TELLS ME THIS MONTH'S CD IS SHEER GENIUS.

You don't mind a 3D overdose, do you? I mean, if you don't have a 3D accelerator yet, there are plenty of classics waiting in the bargain bin. We know most of you have caught the wave, which is what makes you PC gamers and not console jockeys. You'll note that each of the eight games on this month's disc features 3D graphics—even the turn-based wargame. Fancy that.

Hockey fans will be overjoyed with sweat to boot up *NHL 2001* once they admire the enhanced graphics, even if the helmets look more like mirrors than protective gear. *Homeworld Cataclysm* is the stand-alone follow-up (note that they don't call it a sequel) to our 1999 Game of the Year, and is well worth your time. It includes loads of interface tweaks and gameplay enhancements to the original real-time space strategy game. Racing fans should be sure to check out *4x4 Evolution* just to have fun with the arcade physics engine. Overall, a pretty good month, we think.

A small note regarding the disc interface: there is a bug (to be fixed next month) that displays a corrupted screen if you are running Large Fonts. As a temporary work-around, go to Display Properties, choose Settings, click Advanced, and switch to Small Fonts. Or, just ignore the interface, and use Windows Explorer to access the demos.

When you're ready to install the displayed demo, click this button to launch the setup program. It might help to close the interface at this time.



Unfortunately, we can't provide technical support for the games contained on the disc. However, if the disc itself is scratched or defective, you can order a replacement from <http://support.imaginemedi.com>.

GOODIES FOLDER

Check out the goodies folder on the disc for a couple of roleplaying treats (including *Kyle's Quest* for the PalmOS) and the 3D Deep color management software.



The new ice reflections can be turned off for added frames per second if eye candy isn't your goal.

NHL 2001

<http://nhl2001.ea.com/> Electronic Arts
Pentium 200, 32MB RAM

Fans of EA Sports' NHL series have often complained that it's too arcade-oriented. Play has always revolved around the speed boost button, and several goals could be scored every minute. With *NHL 2001*, EA is attempting to do the impossible: please everybody.

In the full game, you'll be treated to several option screens where you can tune the game to your liking, however realistic or arcade-like you wish. This demo gives you a smattering of options, while letting you see all that's available in a boxed copy.

Here, you'll play the New Jersey Devils against the Dallas Stars, either against the computer or versus another person sitting beside you. We think you'll be impressed by the new graphics enhancements. Helmets reflect the environment as well as any pocket mirror, lending themselves to

the good-looking high-resolution faces of the increasingly narcissistic player models. (The full game allows you to import your own mug with unprecedented ease.)

There are several skill levels to choose from before you start your game, so don't be afraid to play on Rookie mode if you're not familiar with the controls. The idea is to get the black puck into the other team's goal. Good luck.



The action is fast and furious, and also seems to be more realistic this time around.

You can pause the action at any point and reposition the camera.

HOMEWORLD CATAclysm

www.sierra.com • Sierra • Pentium 266, 32MB RAM

When we awarded *Homeworld 1999's* Game of the Year, we thought it was nearly perfect. Surprisingly, its follow-up manages to improve on the original in several ways. Developed by Barking Dog Studios (not Relic), *Homeworld Cataclysm* is set 15 years after the events in *Homeworld*, where the future of your people is threatened by the presence of a new alien force. The demo gives you a taste of the improved interface and 25 new ships with a tutorial, the first single-player mission, and multi-player skirmishing against the computer.

The sniping scope comes in handy to get the lay of the land.

DELTA FORCE: LAND WARRIOR

www.novalogic.com • NovaLogic
Pentium 233, 64MB RAM, 3D accelerator

Voxels, be gone! NovaLogic's latest in their series of tactical games gives us a whole new engine featuring smooth 3D graphics. The demo puts you in the eyes of Gas Can, one of the five playable characters from the full game, in a mission set in the deserts of Egypt. Armed with an MM-1 Grenade Launcher and a heart for adventure, it's your job to recover a briefcase filled with deadly toxins. While most action games will have you running guns blazing, patient players will find that stealth and speed will be the key skills needed for success here.

Use the mouse wheel to move the camera from a traditional top-down view to this perspective.

DARK REIGN 2

www.activision.com • Activision
Pentium 233, 64MB RAM, 3D accelerator

Another in the new line of 3D RTS games that break from the traditional 2D mold, *Dark Reign 2* offers lush polygonal environments and units. Take command of your futuristic troops through two single-player missions with this demo, and experience features such as real 3D terrain and a new squad-management interface.

Several shapes, sizes, and colors of enemy await your wrath.

REACH FOR THE STARS

www.reach4ts.com • SSI • Pentium 200, 64MB RAM

Based on the original *Reach for the Stars* released in the 1980s, this modern version is a turn-based strategy game of exploration, colonization, and conquest. While other games let you rule over a planet, *Reach for the Stars* stakes are on a galactic scale, and it may just revitalize a genre that has been lacking in great games lately. Gamers new and old will have a blast.

To get to your next checkpoint, make any shortcuts necessary.

4X4 EVOLUTION

www.4x4evolution.com • Gathering of Developers
Pentium 166, 32MB RAM, 3D accelerator

With its innovative design, the lack of any boundaries essentially allows you to make your own courses, as long as you cross each checkpoint ahead of the competition. Compete in races with your favorite SUV to earn cash, then use your winnings to upgrade and customize your vehicles, selecting from heavy-duty off-road enhancements.



Going my way?

NO ONE LIVES FOREVER

www.the-operative.com • Fox Interactive
Pentium 300, 64MB RAM

It's time to take out the trash, '60s style. You are Cate Archer, secret agent woman. Sporting bell-bottoms and the latest Littech Engine, *No One Lives Forever* will astound you with skeletal animation, locational damage, saturation light blending, and a sense of humor. Add some exotic environments and stereotypical '60s spy comedy, and *NOLF* is sure to add a twist to the action genre. The demo delivers a training level as well as three sample missions from the full game. Groovy, baby!



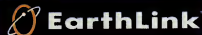
The green hexes show where you can move.

PANZER GENERAL III: SCORCHED EARTH

www.panzergeneral3.com • Mattel Interactive
Pentium 233, 32MB RAM

One of the most successful turn-based strategy franchises of all time, SSI's *Panzer General* series has come a long way since its initial launch in 1994. This latest addition refines the 3D engine implemented in *Panzer General 3D*. Also added are 100 new units, an overview map for better troop control, and new weather conditions.

If you haven't tried the series, be prepared for a fun, full-featured, and accessible wargame experience that newbies and grognards may both like.



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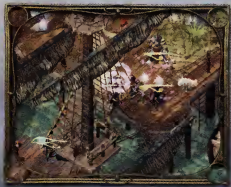
"The World's Fastest GPU"

- 'Nuff Said

"If you loved Baldur's Gate, then... Baldur's Gate 2 is bigger, more ambitious, and just a flat-out better game. Bioware and Black Isle have said they want this to be the only RPG you'll need this year—and, frighteningly, they may be right." - Computer Gaming World

"This sequel features fantastic locales, more spectacular monsters, and more character classes. It promises to be the most ambitious second edition D&D® game ever." - Gamespot

"... Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn will be one of most important RPGs ever released. It is a beautiful epic, bringing to the field a new level of polish, detail and design. And, it's going to change everything." - IGN



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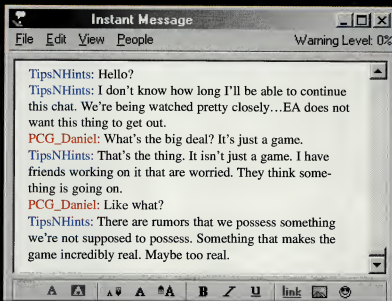
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MAJESTIC

We've got the **WORLD EXCLUSIVE** on the game everyone will be whispering about



You sign up for this new online game. You don't know a whole lot about it, since so much of it is kept secret behind keyboard-secured doors and Pinkerton security patrols in the upper reaches of the Electronic Arts tower in Redwood City, California. All you know about it is that it's intriguing — some kind of X-Files-ish conspiracy game that promises to place you in the center of a digital age suspense thriller.

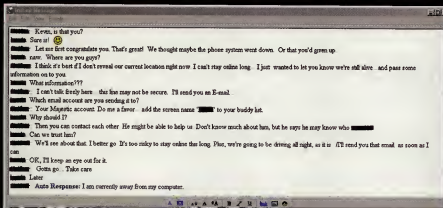
Imagine a game that doesn't switch off. A game that keeps playing even after you've shut down your computer. A game that decides for itself when it's going to inject itself into your life. A game that E-mails and Instant Messages you. A game that sends you real, hard copy faxes. A game that learns the names of your loved ones, and then calls you up in the middle of the night to threaten them by name.

This "game" exists, and is in lots and lots of stages as we write this. *Majestic* might be the

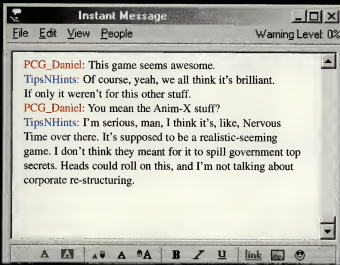
most closely guarded secret in the industry. Utilizing many varied communications technologies, from phone to fax to E-mail to Instant Messenger to the World Wide Web, this bold new form of interactive story will start "playing" when it wants to, and often when you least expect it.

PC Gamer learned about this game from an inside source of EA, who contacted us via E-mail to let us know the basics of what was going on. Bizarrely, the informant's reason for looking the story had less to do with wanting to publicize the game and more to do with genuine concern over the welfare of some of his friends working on the project...

Needless to say, we were a bit intrigued by the E-mails coming to us from this Deep Throat inside EA. We received E-mails and faxes looked from the project. After conducting a one-month investigation, here is what *PC Gamer* knows about *Majestic*, a game that promises to obsorb you like nothing ever before.



Majestic will reach you through just about every communications medium you could care to name. Here's an example of a chat session you might have with the game's cutting-edge purser.



PLAUSIBLE DENIAL

The *Majestic* project is being headed up by veteran Origin/EA designer Neil Young, an affable Englishman best known for his work on *Ultima Online*, and by Brian Cale, the CEO of content developer Anim-X. We spoke briefly with Young about the game and the strange rumors coming out of Anim-X (Cale could not be reached after repeated attempts). Young ultimately issued only this brief statement, after an off-the-record phone call with us:

Hello Dan,

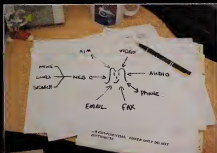
I understand from our PR & legal desks that you're close to running this story. After our phone call, I had hoped that we had been able to clear this up. I'm now deeply concerned that you guys are going to misrepresent to your readers what *Majestic* is. A few points:

1. The reason that we're not talking about *Majestic* is not because of anything sinister on EA's part. Rather and simply that our organization is focused right now on 1) EA.COM's launch 2) the P52 products & 3) The rest of our fabulous Q4 line-up.
 2. Your assertion that *Majestic* is "thickly veiled" and is "based on a true story" is just wrong. Whilst, as I expressed on the phone, I can't tell you what *Majestic* is about, you're way off of the mark.

3. We are co-developing the product with Anim-X, but as Brian Cale and I expressed, there is NOT an "army" of people working on this at EA, or at the Oregon studio and whilst it is admittedly late, there is NO issue or concern about events within Anim-X. You know as well as I do that rumors like that start based on hearsay and rumor vs. hard facts. I have the utmost confidence in Brian, Mike, and the rest of their team's ability to deliver this product.

4. I don't know where you got the info on this project from, but I can assure you that your source is not accurate, is definitely not on the team, nor can they be directly associated with the product.
 Dan, I REALLY do not understand why you, Rob, and the other guys over there want to run this so badly. If you have to print something from me, on the record, tell your readers that *Majestic* is positioned to be the first great internet game, it'll be ready when it's ready and, like every EA product, they should expect excellence.

Yours Sincerely,
 Neil Young,
 Exec. in Charge of Production, VP
 Electronic Arts



A digital picture from our source inside EA shows a diagram of the game's communication hub.

THE GAME THAT DOESN'T STOP PLAYING

Majestic is a conspiracy thriller starring you...and you're not playing any kind of role. It's you, your name, your address, your phone number, E-mail address, and AOL Instant Messenger handle.

The premise is stark and simple; you are suddenly the unlikely central figure in a mystery beyond your comprehension. People have been killed, other people are on the run from shadowy pursuers, and you are the key to unraveling the shadowy conspiracy that has enveloped you all.

There is no actual game to speak of; no executable file or 3D engine. It's a story, which you experience through a daily chain of interactions with a variety of communications media. On Monday, you might receive an E-mail from an informant somewhere. On Tuesday, you might be contacted by AOL IM, to have a conversation with a secret guardian who has taken an active interest in your fate. On Wednesday, you might pursue a clue from the IM chat by scouring the web site of a major biotech firm. On Thursday you might hear absolutely nothing at all, deafened by the sur-



"Fake" sites around the Web will include enthusiast sites from around the conspiracy world.

prising silence. Come Friday, you might trade faxes with a key insider and wake up at 2 a.m. to a phone call — and the voice on the other end of the line might very well be a deep-voiced man who gravis a profane death threat before abruptly hanging up. Heaven only knows what the weekend will bring.

A bold experiment in episodic storytelling, *Majestic* weaves a paranoid world out of thin air, spinning tames of conspiracy lore into a thriller that you may not be able to escape. Covert government agencies will know all about you. Desperate fugitives will turn to you for help, providing you with video footage and shaky camcorder recordings, secret documents, and clues around the Web.

You progress in the game by solving puzzles, researching various mysteries as they appear and unlocking the next piece of the conspiracy puzzle.

This journey begins the moment you sign up for the game at EA.com. You'll be prompted to fill out a lengthy personality test to

allow the game to customize itself around the particulars of your life. (Fans of David Fincher's film *The Game* will find parallels; the movie was a major influence on *Majestic*.) By the end of your registration process, *Majestic* will know quite a bit about you.

But that's just the start. *Majestic* will continue to learn about you as you interact with it, scrutinizing the E-mail you send to apparent informants, and IM messages where you may subconsciously give up vital personal data...the name of your spouse, perhaps, to name just one disturbing example. Before long, you might be eerily surprised to find out what "fictional" characters in the game actually know about your daily life...the game is watching you as you play, and it will be tailoring itself to find new and surprising ways to get inside your real life. Once it does, that's when the real scary stuff starts to happen....

WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS

EA has gone to great lengths to provide a real-world game. There are dummy corporations set up, web sites devoted to fictional radio shows

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One of the dummy corporations established by EA to build a convincing "real-world" setting.

Dirty Deeds, Done to Sheep



SHEEP



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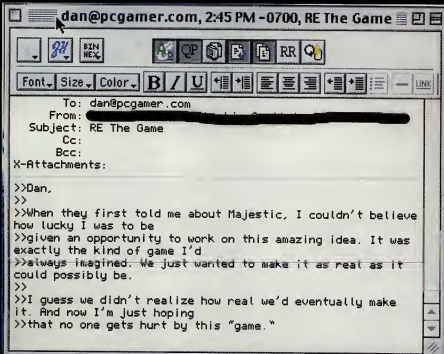
MAJESTIC-12

What's with that elusive title? *Majestic* is named (at least partly) for the Majestic-12, a secret group of top-level government leaders, military officials, and scientists who supposedly coordinate the U.S. government's program to conceal the existence of UFOs and alien beings.

The MJ-12 group (as they're referred to in shorthand by UFOlogists) first emerged in UFO lore in the late 1980s when a noted researcher received an anonymous delivery of what appeared to be secret government documents. The documents appeared to be memorandum dating from 1947, establishing a secret committee to deal with the retrieval of crashed flying saucers near Roswell, New Mexico. The memos included dispatches from Harry Truman himself, and the MJ-12 group was alleged to have included such top military and scientific minds as Admiral Roscoe Hillenkoetter, Secretary of Defense James Forrestal (who would die by suicide shortly thereafter), and Dr. Vannevar Bush.

If the documents are taken at face value, they tell a stunning tale. Upon the recovery of crashed saucers and extraterrestrial corpses, Truman's MJ-12 committee established a policy of total secrecy, while embarking on an effort to conduct a scientific investigation into the alien beings. The committee also establishes guidelines for future protocols, creating an elite Air Force unit to pounce on any new crashed UFOs, and also establishing the rules by which retiring committee members will be replaced.

The MJ-12 documents have been subjected to intense scrutiny by researchers within the field, and while some high-profile personalities (like wealthy Silicon Valley businessman Joe Firmage, a technical advisor on EA's *Majestic*) are convinced of their authenticity, several researchers have offered evidence of a hoax (including inaccuracies in military-style date reporting). In either case, the MJ-12 files make for gripping reading.



(complete with archived RealAudio files of the shows), phone numbers listed all across the country (some with voicemail systems you can actually navigate in search of clues) — all of it designed to get you deeper into the web of intrigue. If you place a phone call to a dummy company in upstate New York, you're actually calling New York from your phone, and you'll be billed accordingly by the phone company. If you mail them a letter out at curiosity, you may receive an official brochure.

So how do you start the game? *Majestic* will be part of the new EA.com entertainment package, which will require a monthly subscription fee. It's scheduled to unfold

in monthly "episodes." These episodes will culminate in six-month cycles to form "seasons" of episodic delivery. The Anim-X team has supposedly outlined nine seasons worth of evolving story, which kicks off with a free "pilot" that will let you sample *Majestic* for yourself.

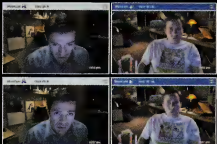
The details of the labyrinthine plot are sketchy at this point, but we do know that the initial mystery involves mind control. Expect vast storm clouds of conspiracy to touch on every-

thing from aliens to immortality — the game's designers are researching every conceivable branch of paranormal/conspiracy lore to provide the eerily convincing world of *Majestic*.

Which brings us back full circle to the enigmatic genesis of this incredible story...the jittery E-mails from our anonymous EA tipster: While refusing to comment on any details, EA confirms that *Majestic* is slated for a February debut. Our questions will be answered then.

In the meantime, all we can do is wait and imagine the astounding possibilities of a game that infiltrates real life to blur the line between the real world and the world of sinister conspiracy. The potential is simply dumbfounding. Imagine a game with no box, and no install files, that takes place not on the computer screen but in your mind, using all forms of stimulus to squeeze inside your head. A couple of months from now, don't be surprised to find yourself glancing in the rear view mirror on the way to work. And remember, just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not out to get you.

EBCG



At various times, you'll be supplied webcam footage with clues from informants.

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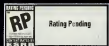
Sent in behind enemy lines for a routine track and capture, you take on the role of Dave Llewelyn Jones, a British and US operative. Suddenly caught between greed and treason, this assignment evolves into a solo mission of stealth and retaliation.

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- Equip yourself with the latest NATO spy gear and assault weapons to defeat enemy surveillance, bunkers, tanks, and gunships.

PROJECT IGI I'M GOING IN™





More realistic details will be added to the stadiums — but still no splash bombs McCovey Cove!

SAMMY SOSA

High Heat 2002

Sammy says, "It's soooo real!" Listen to the man...he knows what he's talking about.

Since you're probably reading this sometime during the month of November, there's a good chance that the weather outside isn't very conducive to the sport of baseball. Depressing, ain't it? Well, we're here to let a little sunlight into your dreary day with some early news on the next version of the awesome High Heat Baseball series. There's no need to thank us...re-upping your subscription for a few more years is enough thanks!

All talk about *Sammy Sosa High Heat Baseball 2002* must begin and end with the graphics. Every detail, from the players to the stadiums to the interface, will be worked on to some degree, as will the rendering engine that drives the game. Both the stadiums and player models will reap the benefits of an

additional 150 polygons or so, and as Jason Ray, lead producer on *High Heat 2002* says, "The player models now use a bi-ped skeleton and are vertex weighted to allow for smoother animation. Furthermore, our stadiums are using vertex lighting for more realistic shadow effects."

New animations will also be plentiful (at last count, it was more than 300), and will include 21 signature-batting styles and 11 pitcher moves. The rest are sprinkled throughout the game, covering minutiae like player fidgets and running motions. You can also expect to see new, cleaner textures everywhere, as 3DO hopes to convince the more casual fan to give *High Heat 2002* a try by enticing them with a game that not only plays well, but also gives them eye-candy.

With such an emphasis being placed on the look of the game, you'd be forgiven for thinking that gameplay features will be an afterthought. While it's true that the added feature list isn't the strongest its ever been, there's plenty here to get excited about. The most visible change, and the one that should have the most impact on gameplay, is the new cut-off man. Now, in addition to deciding whether or not to use the relay man on throws from the outfield, you'll have to decide whether to let the throw (from either the outfielder or relay man) go all the way through to the catcher or to cut it off, in

order to throw out runners. Gone will be the days of helplessly watching the man on first stroll to second because your outfielder has a chicken arm and needs five hops to reach home with a throw. Now you'll be able to hit a button to enable the cut-off man, run up to intercept the throw and either hold the runner on first or have a chance at throwing him out at second. Fans have been asking for this feature since *High Heat 2000*, and it should improve the game quite a bit.



Here's one for the ladies: that's none other than Giants hottie JT Snow at the plate. You're welcome!

F.Y.I.

CATEGORY: Sports

DEVELOPER: 3DO

PUBLISHER: 3DO

PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 60%

RELEASE DATE: March 2001

IN A NUTSHELL: It's the follow-up to the best baseball game ever.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL?: Most games are off our hard drives within a week. More than half-a-year after its release, you can still find *High Heat 2001* played on a regular basis by Brit-import, baseball-neophyte Rob Smith, as well as USA-born, baseball-lover Rob Smolka.

The other major gameplay changes revolve around the man wearing the tools of ignorance—the catcher. Snap throws to first or third base to pick off daydreaming base runners will now be part of his repertoire. Also, if he drops or lets a ball get by him on a third strike (and first base is unoccupied), he'll have to either tag or throw the batter out before he reaches first base. These won't be as big a factor as the cut-off man, but it's nice to see more of the actual rules of baseball being incorporated into the game.

Many of the other new additions fall into this realism category—there's nothing revolutionary about them, but they reflect the rules of actual Major League Baseball. Take manager visits to the mound, for instance. This new feature doesn't change the basic game very much, but it will let you find out the status of your pitcher, try to influence his performance (a smack on the ass is just the thing a grown man needs to throw the ball better), and, most importantly, kill some time while your reliever gets ready in the bullpen. It's little things like this that help create the illusion that it's more than a computer game.

You'll also get to see animated base coaches and on-deck hitters in *High Heat 2002*. And sometimes, when a batter or fielder is less than thrilled with an umpire's call (on a third strike or a play at first base) there's now a chance he'll be ejected from the game. Suspensions can also occur when two teams get into a nasty bean-ball war (pitchers can't take as many liberties impaling their opponents as they used to). Of course, the heave-ho-delivering umpire will be animated on the field, too.

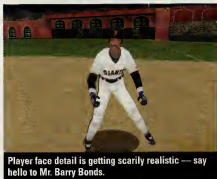
There are plenty of other things planned that should only help draw us further into our baseball fantasies. Errors can now occur on dropped throws. Rain will be a factor during games (and can be toggled on or off). There won't be any rainouts, but games can end because of rain if they're official. It's still



not verified if a long delay will affect a pitcher's performance, and for now it will have no effect on the playing conditions, but look for rain effects to be expanded upon in future versions. In September, the roster size will increase from 25 to 40, just as it does in MLB. HTML output file support will put a smile on the face of many a commissioner that has tried to run an online High Heat league in the past. More stats will be recorded, too, including streaks, season records, and a team summary screen that will store all the info you need in one place.

In the audio department, Ted Robinson has been given the axe, and will be replaced by an as yet unannounced two-man crew. Also, research has been done to see how crowds react in different situations, and this data will be used to make the crowds sound realistic. Let's hope no sharp objects are thrown or that a barrage of four-letter words erupts as John Rocker takes the mound!

Additional tweaks are being made to base running, such as computer controlled runners



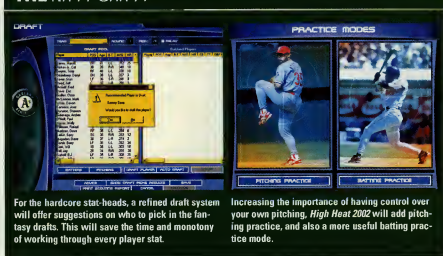
trying to steal. Ray says, "We're continuing to work diligently on the base-running AI. The base runners will sometimes be conservative, sometimes make an ill-advised dash for the next base. We might introduce a hot-key that will allow the user to manually advance the runners while they are under AI control."

Last but not least is the work being done on the AI. Ray says, "We have had three different engineers working on AI flaws since the release of *High Heat 2001*. Truthfully, I can't remember the specifics of all the changes they've made, but some interesting bugs were found and fixed. For instance, there were times when throws from right field would mysteriously go to first base. This was addressed. We also improved the collision detection for AI-controlled outfielders. In previous versions of *High Heat*, they'd sometimes get stuck chasing balls hit to the corners of the outfield."

As you can see, there's a lot going on, even if it all may not be readily visible. The High Heat team has already proven that it knows how to make a great game, and we've little doubt that *High Heat 2002* will be yet another feather in the team's cap. But now comes the hard part...the long, four-month wait until baseball season arrives.

—Rob Smolka

THE NITTY-GRITTY



For the hardcore stat-heads, a refined draft system will offer suggestions on who to pick in the fantasy drafts. This will save the time and monotony of working through every player stat.

Increasing the importance of having control over your own pitching, *High Heat 2002* will add pitching practice, and also a more useful batting practice mode.

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MS Train Simulator

Microsoft rides the rails

Growing a little tired of the conventional flight and racing products currently dominating the PC simulation market? Fear not, because Microsoft and Kuju Entertainment are cooking up a new title that is certain to throw a whole new twist into the concept of PC simming as we know it. *Microsoft Train Simulator*

is set to roll out sometime early next year, and when it does, you can forget everything you've ever learned about vehicular dynamics and engine instrumentation. The only G-forces that you'll likely experience from the cab of a Dash-9 diesel locomotive or a turn-of-the-century steam engine will be of the "Gee, these things are frigging huge!" variety.

Incorporating more than 600 miles of track backdropped with satellite-enhanced terrain from around the world, *MS Train Simulator* will feature such fabled trains as Britain's Flying Scotsman and the world famous Orient Express. Modern railroads such as Amtrak's new high-speed Northeastern line, a Burlington Northern freight line through Montana, Japan's Odakyu Electric, and Kyushu Railways will also figure into the lineup. As with previous Microsoft simulation products, *Train Simulator* will incorporate an open-



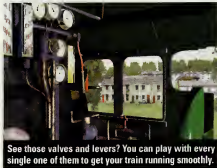
Controlling such a huge machine is going to be quite the challenge.

architecture design to permit the addition of countless user created add-ons.

Every valve and lever is in your control in the sim's accurately rendered locomotive cabs. Alternatively you can participate in a number of different challenges and scenarios. These might include adhering to a passenger timetable or getting a 50-car freight train over the Marias Pass in the dead of winter. Kuju's Ian Haverstock says, "The controls of driving a vehicle weighing thousands of tons are more complicated than you might think, but once you throw hills and gradients into the equation, the whole experience becomes even more challenging."

It would appear that, despite its velocity-challenged vehicles, *MS Train Simulator* will still offer plenty of serious gameplay value for simulation buffs. Expect the airbrakes to come off sometime early in the spring of 2001.

— Andy Mahood



See those valves and levers? You can play with every single one of them to get your train running smoothly.

F.Y.I.

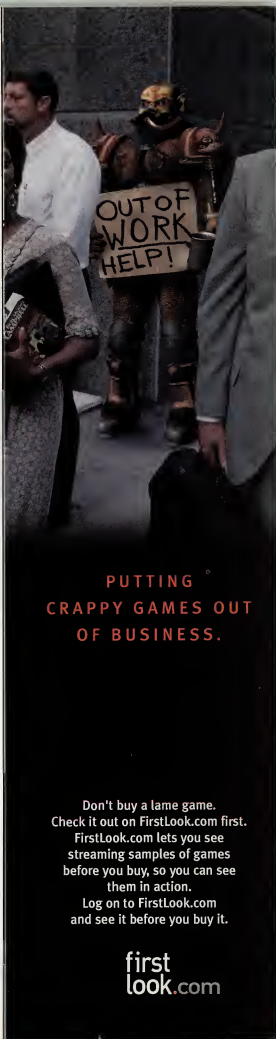
CATEGORY: Simulation

DEVELOPER: Kuju Entertainment

PUBLISHER: Microsoft

PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 60%

RELEASE DATE: Spring 2001



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IL-2 Sturmovik

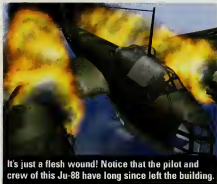
Defending the Motherland has never been so fun



You can select from a set of several gunpods to place on the Me-109G-6.

It is quite fitting that a Russian developer should be the first to craft a historical flight sim that brings the air war of the Russian Front to the PC. *IL-2 Sturmovik* is the brainchild of Oleg Maddox, a former Soviet military research engineer, who has been developing PC games and simulations since 1992. Maddox Games and Blue Byte Software's ambitious new WWII prop sim certainly couldn't come at a better time for innovation-starved PC aviators caught in the throes of a serious flight sim famine.

Featuring 17 flyable aircraft, *IL-2's* hangar will be filled to capacity with a variety of Soviet and German planes. Three models of the German BF-109, a pair of Soviet MIG-3s and LaGG-3s, and seven variants of the indomitable Russian IL-2 Sturmovik ground-attack fighter are all waiting to be flown.



It's just a flesh wound! Notice that the pilot and crew of this Ju-88 have long since left the building.

There will also be a trio of P-39 Aircobra models (on loan to the Russians from the U.S.) and you can alternatively choose to serve as the tail-gunner in the two-seat IL-2 while an AI pilot controls the plane. Based on my initial few hours of stick time with a pre-release build of *IL-2*, this Russian project looks set to rewrite the book on PC aircraft dynamics. Accelerated stalls, flat spins, weather, and temperature affected aircraft performance — you name it and these vintage warplanes respond like champs. Despite the sim's high degree of aeronautic fidelity however, rookie pilots will be able take comfort in the fact that the featured IL-2 Sturmovik — a.k.a. the "Flying Tank" — is by nature a very robust and easy aircraft to fly.

Even more impressive than the flight modeling are the advanced graphics and complex damage modeling that Maddox plans to incorporate into the sim. Detailed modular construction will be used to render each aircraft so that it will be entirely possible to tear off a wingtip after hitting an inconveniently placed tree or collapse a landing gear strut with an overly enthusiastic landing. Individual bullet holes will also be plainly visible along the fuselage, and the pyrotechnic effects that I've witnessed so far manage to outshine even those found in *Jane's WWII Fighters*. The terrain graphics are equally impressive, and Maddox has not only gone to the trouble of rendering individual trees but also individual waves crashing in against the shore!

Six historical campaigns covering the period between 1941 and 1945 (you can fly for either the Russian or German sides) are planned, but Maddox has chosen to incorporate a semi-dynamic scripted campaign structure. Maddox says, "Our campaign system can't be defined as static or dynamic — it is somewhere in between. There are branching paths and scenario changes depending on your overall success, rank, and awards. You will see a lot of ground units fighting on a large scale, and this sort of 'dynamic environment' is more important in a ground-attack flight sim than a 'dynamic campaign' as such." Multiplayer fans will also be glad to note that Blue Byte's dedicated Gaming Channel will support up to 32 players in head-to-head mode and as many as 16 players in cooperative mode. A powerful Mission Builder utility will also ship with the game.

IL-2 Sturmovik will be available to North American customers exclusively via Blue Byte's online store when it releases in early 2001. Considering that this remarkable new title looks poised to elevate PC combat flight simming to an entirely new level of realism and fidelity, serious WWII aviation buffs may wish to get their credit cards out now.

— Andy Mahood

F.Y.I.

CATEGORY: Flight Sim

DEVELOPER: Maddox Games

PUBLISHER: Blue Byte

PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 60%

RELEASE DATE: Spring 2001

IN A NUTSHELL: Fly more than 17 different Russian, German, and American aircraft models in a series of historical missions set against WWII's punishing Russian Front. The sim's high-fidelity flight models and state-of-the-art graphics are likely to impress even the most demanding of hardcore simulation enthusiasts.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL?: The aerial war over the Russia during WWII is one of the most neglected air campaigns in the history of PC flight simming. Factoring in the perfectionism of the game's creator, *IL-2 Sturmovik* promises to be one of the most well-crafted prop sims ever.

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Dirk may still look 2D, but that's a very 3D world he's running around in.



His trusty sword is still Dirk's primary weapon.



Hey, weren't these skulls in the first game?

Dragon's Lair 3D

The arcade legend lives! And then dies. And then lives again! And dies...

If the phrase, "Lead on, adventurer; your quest awaits" means anything to you, then you've probably punched more quarters in the *Dragon's Lair* arcade game than you care to recall. For the past 17 years, the revolutionary laserdisc game that transfixed arcade-goers in 1983 has never stopped selling, whether at the arcade, in console ports, on CD-ROM, or, most recently, DVD. Even the puny Gameboy now has an impossibly arcade-perfect port. Obviously, such success couldn't be ignored...much less

by *Dragon's Lair* co-creator, Rick Dyer.

Dragonstone Software began in April '99 with the sole purpose of developing *Dragon's Lair 3D* following a call from Dyer to

fellow creators Don Bluth and Gary Goldman. The idea of recreating an interactive cartoon with *Zelda*-like gameplay and lush 3D graphics immediately appealed to both mind and pocketbook.

For those just out of a 20-year long coma (if that's you, stop reading and go outside or something), *Dragon's Lair* tells the tale of Dirk the Daring, a brave but undeniably dim knight, questing to save the obscenely nubile Princess Daphne from an evil wizard, and of course, one big honkin' green dragon. In search of the dragon's lair he goes, barely evading traps, both clever and inane, like crumbling rooms, poisonous potions, plummeting elevators, and rampaging giant marbles. Even at fifty cents a pop, seeing Dirk die was almost as fun as making him live, largely due to the work of ex-Disney animator Don Bluth (of *Titan A.E.* fame).

Surprisingly, not much has changed for *Dragon's Lair 3D*. While Bluth will contribute only the opening and closing cartoon sequences, everything else about the game remains true to the spirit of the original. At your own pace, you'll explore an expanded version of the old cartoon dungeons, featuring a vast array of new scenes, and a longer story. Considering that the original took about six minutes to complete (with around 20 minutes of total animation), how much longer is it? Considerably. Dyer estimates it'll take players

between 20 to 30 hours to finish...and that's not even on the hardest difficulty setting.

"But," the most asked question around the office goes, "how does it play?" Very well, thank you for asking. The original's outdated gameplay (flash to the right, go right; flash to the left, go left) have been thrown out the window in favor of a third-person *Tomb Raider*-style approach. However, if the burden of nostalgia leaves you hankering for old-fashioned *Dragon's Lair*, Classic Mode

F.Y.I.

CATEGORY: Action/Adventure

DEVELOPER: Dragonstone Software

PUBLISHER: Blue Byte

PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 55%

RELEASE DATE: April 2001

IN A NUTSHELL: A freshly explorable recreation of the arcade smash hit.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL?: Several key members of the original team are back working on this, ensuring that the new and improved gameplay satisfies old-school fans while appealing to a new generation of gamers.

Give us a kiss!

lets you play the original six-minute game using the new engine, but with the old control mechanics. This is the gaming equivalent of 1998's *Psycho*: a shot-by-shot recreation of the original.

Intermediate Mode will be the most popular difficulty setting, though. Featuring 200 rooms and 30 different creatures, the game follows the familiar *Dragon's Lair* story beginning with the opening drawbridge sequence. From there, you can enter any of three different-themed annexes: one filled with catacombs, one cavernous, and one inspired by the bizarre artistry of M.C. Escher. Each of the game's 19 levels will have an end boss, most, like the giant spider and electric knight, imported directly from the arcade game.

Sequences from the original have been painstakingly remade in 3D, except the direction you take is now yours. Remember the original's hallway full of doors? Before, you only had two choices: the flashing door or death. Now you can open any door and explore...if you can survive the diabolical death trap awaiting you, that is. Like before, you will die — often — but you can “creep and save” your way through the game, and you could make wrong choices just to see each unique, yet hilarious, death animation.

Borrowing textures directly from the original animation cels, *Dragonstone* is intent on making *Dragon's Lair 3D* look as much like its predecessor as possible, a process that has been made easier now that *Dragon's Lair* artist Reuben Chavez has returned as the game's texture artist, transferring his own 2D art into 3D. Dirk, Daphne, and their rogue's gallery of villains seem to have been ripped directly from the cartoon, maintaining their classic 2D look. None other than Bluth himself personally oversees Dirk's appearance and animations (200 in all), and Princess Daphne will be just as pert, perky, and leggy as you remember. Character voices are even provided by the original actors, as Dirk, remaining true to his arcade predecessor, grunts and groans his way to misadventure.

Being a game for the whole family (or as Steven Parsons, *Dragonstone* president, puts it: “for ages 6 to 60”) means there won't be any blood or gore. A multiplayer game was briefly considered, but the prospects — Dirk versus Daphne death-matches? — weren't exactly palatable. Like before, enemies glow purple and pop out of existence when killed. The team freely admits to “lifting” a few game mechanics directly from *The Legend of Zelda*: Dirk's sword can be upgraded to a flaming sword, giving him an explosive spinning attack; targeting is handled with a single button; three different types of crossbows can be added to Dirk's arsenal; and even the heart-based health bar looks very familiar. Dirk's quest also includes a hunt for five *Dragon* Essences, ornate gems that give him new abilities like flame resistance, dragon strength, or the aforementioned flaming sword, and open up new areas. Expect the unexpected, though: carrying a magical essence may cause inanimate objects nearby — like statues — to suddenly come to life.

Because there's so much to see and do, replay value should be high (especially on Hard Mode, where you must find 16 very well-hidden heart icons to finish the game). By the time you find all the secrets, a sequel could be on the way; if *Dragon's Lair 3D* is successful, Dyer promises gamers that they won't have to wait another 17 years for Dirk's next adventure.

— Chuck Osborn

SPACE ACE 3D?



Speculation about the fate of that other laserdisc hero, *Space Ace*, is over. Rick Dyer has revealed to us that a similarly styled *Space Ace 3D* will be *Dragonstone's* next project. No word yet on a release date or who will publish it.

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Q&A with Rick Dyer

PCG: Did you consider making *Dragon's Lair 3D* an arcade game first?

DYER: There's a possibility that a new version of the 3D game will be introduced to arcades after the home release, but I can't give any details away right now.

PCG: Is it true that the first *Dragon's Lair* was initially longer? **DYER:** 20-25 percent of the original footage from *Dragon's Lair* was scrapped because, during free testing, kids asked, “Do I have to keep playing?” The original version had branching storylines, but search times were so long that it wasn't very playable. There was also a little too much violence; Dirk's deaths were too graphic, and we had to get rid of it. We went back to the animators and asked them to tone it down and make it funnier. We're investigating sticking that unused footage somewhere into *Dragon's Lair 3D*.

Mafia: La Cosa Nostra

Becoming a goodfella just got a little bit easier

Illusion Softworks' *Mafia: La Cosa Nostra* is for everyone who's ever aspired to be a made man, a goodfella, a mobster. From chases in classic cars to shootouts in smoke-filled bars with a Tommy gun, *Mafia* promises the closest mob experience you can get without ending up sleeping with the fishes. Daniel Vavra, *Mafia* lead designer at Illusion Softworks, says, "We want to allow the player to live the life of a mobster, with everything that is connected to it, including family life, friendship, car chases, or collecting protection money."

Picture an everyday red-blooded American city called Lost Heaven. It's a bustling metropolis with everything that a big city needs; it's vivacious, materialistic, and productive. Lost Heaven also has a healthy crime rate, and you are the criminal cancer pumping through its veins.

Mafia: La Cosa Nostra puts you in the shoes of an ex-cabbie gone mobster. You start off as a low-level foot soldier in the fictional Salieri family and work your way to becoming a made man. You'll take part in hits, be the getaway driver for jobs, act as an enforcer, and be a general zoot-suited menace to society. Sound like an ambitious game? Vavra says, "It's an action game, but it is also a racing game, and there is also a very strong adventure element, and stealth missions, and so on and so on."

The city of Lost Heaven has been meticulously detailed and takes up eight square miles of virtual land. There will be 20 indoor and outdoor locations to play in. You'll visit downtown, explore Chinatown, and even



Public transportation is alive and well in the city of Lost Heaven. Excellent news!

take some countryside roads to the outskirts of Lost Heaven when things get too hot in the city. Vavra says, "All the cars, buildings, clothes, and weapons are historically correct and real. We wanted to recreate the right atmosphere, so we spent lot of time just researching how things worked those days."

How will you reach these locals? Illusion Softworks (developer of *Hidden & Dangerous*) is hard at work modeling no fewer than 60 authentic 1960s era cars. You'll drive everything from Roadsters to delivery trucks and be able to stop the car anytime you want to go explore the sights and sounds of the city, or to gun down a rat in an alley.

Don't think that you'll be running around Lost Heaven with impunity. The long arm of the law is out in force, and they will do their best to stop you. They'll pursue you in wild car chases and happily shoot it out with you if you refuse to be taken alive.

These men of the badge never forget a face, and they'll remember every crime you commit throughout the entire game.

Considering the breadth of options avail-

able in *Mafia*, we can't help but look forward to making a name for ourselves in the city of Lost Heaven. So when 2001 rolls around, you can be sure that we'll soil our already seedy lives and try our hand at life in the virtual underworld.

— Li C. Kuo

F.Y.I.

CATEGORY: Action/Driving

DEVELOPER: Illusion Softworks

PUBLISHER: Talonsoft

PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 70%

RELEASE DATE: Second Quarter 2001

IN A NUTSHELL: This is a third-person action-adventure game where you can basically roam freely through a huge 1930s Chicago-esque city with the goal of becoming a made man. Murder, extortion, grand theft — you'll do it all while dodging the law and making sure that you don't screw up and get whacked.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL?: People say looks aren't everything, but the engine being used for *Mafia* looks incredible. Also, the level of detail that is being put into the city of Lost Heaven should make for one of the most immersive gaming environments ever.



Nobody ever said that being a wiseguy was gonna be easy.

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Your hand is hungry for something more. Not a joystick that just sits there while it does all the work. No, your hand wants a force feedback-infused machine that reacts to every jerk, crash and explosion of the game. The WingMan Force 3D Joystick. Your hand deserves it.



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What if the Ancient Egyptians
had worshiped the god of
commerce? What if Japan
hadn't bombed Pearl Harbor?
What if the Aztecs had
invaded Spain? What if
Julius Caesar hadn't been
assassinated? What if
you led the world?



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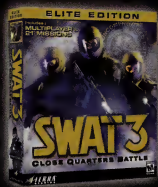
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SWAT 3 owners can upgrade their software to include Elite Edition's multiplayer features and toolkit free of charge. See www.sierrastudios.com for more details. © 2000 Sierra On-Line, Inc. All rights reserved. Sierra, Sierra Studios, SWAT and Close Quarters Battle are trademarks of Sierra On-Line, Inc. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.

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NO SECOND CHANCES.**



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Verant Smacks Down EverQuest Mod

Cease and desist order given to macro maker



EverQuest is one of the most successful massively multiplayer online roleplaying games ever.

Ben Ziegler is just like 300,000 other EverQuest fanatics. He enjoys Verant's enormously successful and addictive online RPG, and spends a great chunk of his time in the Sony-owned company's virtual world. As is the trend nowadays, Ben got to wondering how he could make *EQ* even better, and started working on some mods. By late March of this year, he released what is now known as *EQ Macros*.

This independently created batch of goodies includes a slew of features designed to enhance the *EverQuest* experience. It includes sought after features like an on-screen map, a compass, the ability to record macros and set waypoints, and even a web browser so that you can surf the web while playing.

EQ Macros is a hit. At press time, about 4,000 people have downloaded trial versions of the program, and 900 people have registered for the full version. Ziegler got loads of E-mail singing the praises of his work. *EverQuest* players loved how *EQ Macros* decreased the number of keystrokes needed to play the popular game, and said that by streamlining the controls, they spent more time playing and less time hitting buttons over and over

again. For example, if you want to use your "Sense Heading" skill while traveling a long distance, you'll have to hit your "Sense Heading" button to activate it, wait until it runs out, recharge, and then hit the button again, and again, and again...repeating the procedure ad nauseum until you reach your destination. With *EQ Macros*, you can eliminate the need to hit the button over and over again and just concentrate on your journey.

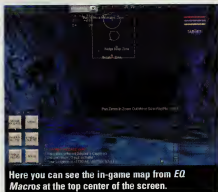
It didn't take long for Verant to take notice. Gordon Wrinn, from Verant's customer service department, downloaded a registered copy of *EQ Macros* to see if it was kosher. A few hours after Wrinn downloaded his copy, Ziegler received an E-mail from Verant's CEO, John Smedley, asking him to stop all work on *EQ Macros*. Smedley's E-mail said, "I've recently seen your *EQ Macro* program and I'm going to have to ask you to stop distributing it. It is in direct violation of our Terms of Service and any person caught using it will be banned." Ziegler responded by sending Smedley an E-mail proposing that they work together to modify *EQ Macros* to make it acceptable to Verant, saying, "I would be willing to explore all possibilities in making *EQM* fit with the *EverQuest*

vision." Smedley never responded. Instead, Ziegler was slapped with a cease and desist order by Andy Zaffron, Vice President and General Counsel for Sony Online Entertainment. In an E-mail to Ziegler, Zaffron says, "The *EQ Macros* product, among other things, is a breach of the *EverQuest* User Agreement and Software License...it also violates Sony's Exclusive rights under the Copyright Act." Zaffron cited the Software License agreement's explicit prohibition of users "disassembling, decompiling and/or reverse engineering the software (section 7), (ii) using third party software to modify the game (section 9)."

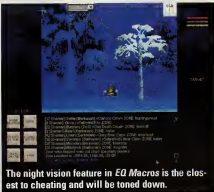
He then specifically pointed out that the zone maps, compass, and zone location features of *EQ Macros* were all created through reverse engineering of *EverQuest* software. The E-mail warned that if Ziegler did not stop all production and distribution of *EQ Macros*, Sony would commence legal action.

Ziegler was quick to defend himself. He says, "*EQM* is not a malicious program. It doesn't let the player do anything that they can't already do (it just makes it easier)." Fans of the program have flocked to his defense. One user of *EQM* that wrote to Verant says, "*EQ Macros* is really doing nothing that a user can't do for themselves. Online mapping—I can go to any web site and print out a map; updated location info—I can repeatedly hit the Location button; timing for spawns—I can sit in front of my computer with a stopwatch. The list goes on. For each 'feature' in *EQ Macros*, there is a corresponding way for me to do it without the program."

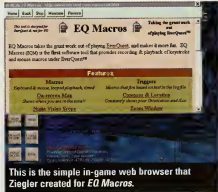
Some *EverQuest* players have even cancelled their subscriptions in protest of Verant's actions. *PC Gamer* has been sent E-mail copies of some of these cancellations. Ziegler also points out that when Sony first looked at *EQM* they said that the use of macros was okay as long as you were physically sitting in front of the computer and watching the screen while using them. The night vision, compass, web browser, and on-screen maps were added later because of feedback from users. Ziegler wants to make it clear that he's willing to tweak his program any way Verant wants to keep it in use by *EQ* players. His offer of full cooperation has only been met by one response from Verant: Cease and Desist.



Here you can see the in-game map from *EQ Macros* at the top center of the screen.



The night vision feature in *EQ Macros* is the closest to cheating and will be toned down.



This is the simple in-game web browser that Ziegler created for *EQ Macros*.

For now, Ziegler has complied with Verant's requests and has put *EQ Macros* on temporary hiatus. He has also retained a lawyer and is preparing to give an official response to Verant's cease-and-desist order. Verant continues to remain firm on their no-nonsense policy against *EQ Macros*. In an interview with Brad McQuaid, Vice President at Sony Online Games, he explains why, saying, "It's important that we do our best to maintain a fair playing environment. We feel a third party program that gives an advantage to the player running it over another player who isn't

running it interferes with that goal." McQuaid goes on: "Another goal of ours back when we were designing *EverQuest* was to make exploration a key aspect of gameplay. We therefore decided against implementing a built-in compass and map. Knowledge of where to go, who to fight, and how to adventure outdoors and in dungeons is meant to be almost as important as a character's stats and equipment."

So who is the victim in the end? Is it the users who get shafted because they are being denied a program that helps to enhance their online gaming

time? Or is it the *EverQuest* vision, being compromised by over-zealous fans? Either way, this situation is a real shame; some of the best games today became great because of user-created mods. Imagine what *Half-Life* would be without *Team Fortress Classic* or *Counterstrike*. Think about how different the gaming world would be if it did all the mod makers that they were infringing on their copyrights. One of the greatest things about PC gaming is the existence of user-created mods; here's hoping Verant and its fans can reach some kind of truce.

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ALL ENTRIES MUST BE RECEIVED BY DECEMBER 31, 2000. ONLY ONE ENTRY PER PERSON. INCLUDE YOUR ADDRESS IN THE ENTRY SO WE HAVE SOMEPLACE TO SEND THE PRIZE TO IF YOU WIN! SEE ADDITIONAL CONTEST RULES ON PAGE 43.

Black & White Delayed

Peter Molyneux tells us why, and why it will be worth the wait



As you may have heard, *Black & White's* release has been delayed until February 2001. However, in an IRC chat on September 20, Lionhead founder Peter Molyneux revealed that his game will be finished on October 9 of this year, and that the decision to postpone its release was made by their publisher, Electronic Arts. We contacted Peter in order to make sense of this seemingly foolish marketing act. His response seemed to be more defensive than accusatory. Here is the statement he gave us:

"The full story is that about four weeks ago, we had a company meeting where everyone decided after they had played the game that there were still a number of tasks left to do if we were to fulfill the full potential of *Black & White* and that we needed until 9th October in order to do this and we are very much on track for that. This means that when EA gets the version on this date for final test even if there are no bugs (which is very unlikely knowing my code), [they] will need eight weeks for testing, translation, and configuration checks before the game is ready for release, which takes us into December/January and to be fair to EA, I have no doubt that they want to release this as soon as they can.

The thing with making games, and I can't stress this enough, is how hard it is to finish any game — but *Black & White* is just so ambitious in every way that it has proved extremely difficult to finalize. *Black & White* is certainly the best game I've ever worked on and I want there to be no reason why this game will not be everything I know it can be, and that is the best possible game we can produce. I really apologize for the delay and if it was humanly possible to have finished the

game earlier I would have done it. I hope that everyone understands this and also would like to thank everyone who has supported us."

— Peter Molyneux



This game look so cool, we want it now!

PC GAMER

RECOMMENDS

Gato says, "They killed 'Ho, Ho, Ho!'"

HEAVY METAL F.A.K.K. 2



90%

Add equal parts action and thongs, and you've got one heck of a game.

AGE OF KINGS: THE CONQUERORS



93%

Considered by many to be the first "perfect" RTS. A must-play.

HOMEWORLD: CATAclySM



91%

A more than worthy follow-up to 1999's game of the year.

THE SIMS LIVIN' LARGE



85%

Just one more reason for you to be a sim junkie. Enjoy.

THE PCG NEWS TICKER

Those eagerly awaiting the next *Alone in the Dark* game will have to wait a little longer than expected. The Infogrames game has been delayed until Winter 2001. Plans are to release the PC, Dreamcast, and Gameboy versions all at the same time.

By the time this issue is out, a *Diablo* bundle from Blizzard Entertainment should be in stores. The set will come with full versions of *Diablo* and *Diablo II*, and will come with an official strategy guide for each game.

Tim Curry has signed on for voice acting duty for Shiny's upcoming game, *Sacrifice*. You may know him from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* and *Clue*. He will be voicing the character Stratos. Let's hope it's better than *Frankenstein*.

Another game engine is being licensed out to developers. Most recently seen in *Vampire: The Masquerade — Redemption*, Nihilistic's NOD Engine is on the licensing block. So far, no takers have been announced.

WAITING IS THE HARDEST PART

Now things are getting hot! Not only has *Shadowbane* been severely trounced, but we got four straight days of nothing but votes for *Tribes 2*! Looks like those delays have fans itching more than ever to get their hands on this one. Send in your vote to eyewitness@pcgamer.com with "Waiting is the Hardest Part" in the subject heading. Remember, one vote per household, per month. We'll randomly pick a person to win a free game from us at the end of each month. This issue's winner is Justin Foster, who voted for *WarCraft III*. See additional rules on page 48.

1. Tribes 2 — 23%
2. Ultima Worlds Online: Origin — 12%
3. Shadowbane — 8%
4. Team Fortress 2 — 8%
5. Warcraft III — 5%
6. Halo — 3%
7. Black & White — 2%
8. Max Payne — 2%
9. Duke Nukem Forever — 2%
10. Red Faction — 2%

GAME FACE



NAME >>> Abigail
 ONLINE NAME >>> Freedomfighter21
 FROM >>> Lynwood, CA
 LAST GAME PLAYED >>> *Half-Life*
 LOOKING FORWARD TO >>>
Diablo II
 FAVORITE GAMING SNACK >>>
 Ultimate Bacon Cheeseburger

Show us yours. Who are you? Let us know by sending in your picture and answering the same questions this gamer did above to eyewitness@pcgamer.com. Be sure to put "Game Face" in the subject heading.

Where Have All the Legends Gone? Part 2

We find Steve Meretzky and Scott Murphy and get an update

Last month, we played catch-up with previous Game Gods and legends of the industry. This month we uncovered the whereabouts of Steve "Planetfall" Meretzky and Scott "Space Quest series" Murphy. Where are they now? Read on:

STEVE MERETZKY

CLAIM TO FAME: *Planetfall*, *Leather Goddesses of Phobos*, *The Space Bar*, *Sinistar Unleashed*, and *many more*.

What's life like now for Steve Meretzky, the PC Gamer Game God?

Steve Meretzky: Oh, you want Steve Meretzky, the PC Gamer Game God? He lives upstairs on the ninth floor. Ever since he was named a Game God by PC Gamer, the ninth floor has been Party Central. Babes really get off on that whole "Game God" thing.

What are you doing nowadays?

Steve: I'm working at *WorldWinner.com*, creating games for our site. *WorldWinner* is a place where people can go if they're interested in competing against other players in games of skill for cash prizes. We've already had people win thousands of dollars playing our games. Anyway, they call me "Director of Creative Content," which is the same as "Game Designer" only it pays better.

Do you think adventure games are dead?

Steve: No, but they're on life support, and the heirs are skirmishing over the will. When an adventure game as superb as *Grim Fandango* barely covers its costs, I don't think it's premature to suggest the priest for last rights. The good news is that many of the elements of adventure games are migrating into other computer game genres, like action-adventures and platform games.

Do you think text adventure games are dead?

Steve: Commercially, they're dead. But as a non-commercial medium, they're thriving! There are several excellent freeware engines for writing text adventures, and a small but passionate user base. See www.xyzynews.com. I might try writing one myself some day, when I have some free time.



Sinistar Unleashed

SCOTT MURPHY

CLAIM TO FAME: *The Space Quest Series* (1, 2, 3, and 6)

What are you doing nowadays?

Scott: *Space Quest*. Pretty boring and simple stuff, actually. (At times though, this is a very pleasant change from the stress and tension of having to pull a game out of your ass when the company's spending a couple mil on it and those in charge can't possibly comprehend what you're doing or envisioning. But I'm not bitter, mind you.) I'm working in the business my grandfather started more than 40 years ago.

Adventure games, dead or alive?

Scott: Alive only in the hearts of some of us, unfortunately.



Are you still into games now? Are you playing any games now?

Scott: Lately, I've been playing all the NASCAR racing simulators I can find. Otherwise, I don't find much out there that I'm interested in. Granted, I haven't been paying as much attention to the market these days. From what I can tell though, there seems to be a fairly nasty creative famine on-going.

Will the guys from *Andromeda* ever make another game?

Scott: I think the chances are fairly non-existent. No one wants to spend the money on adventures anymore. Unless you can sell a couple million units in the first quarter of sales, you can't convince the people that are now running the industry's larger companies that they're worth doing. Big companies, and who else is there, don't like niche markets or cult followings, and that's what they think the adventure market is. The big problem is that there are no true visionaries or leaders apparent in the PC entertainment software industry anymore, just money people.

THE PCG NEWS TICKER

» Techno DJ artist and friend of actress Natalie Portman, Moby is putting together the lead track for Electronic Arts' *FIFA 2001 Major League Soccer*. Plans are for a remixed version of Moby's *Bodyrock* to be in the game, which should be available soon.

» Cryo has signed a deal with Dark Horse comics for the rights to create a PC game based on the *Hellboy* comics. The game will be a third-person action/adventure game and is planned for a November 2000 release.

» Universal Interactive Studios is working on a PC game based on the upcoming movie, *Jurassic Park 3*. The action/adventure game will be released on both consoles and PCs. It will be the first of many games with a *Jurassic Park* license.

» Chris Hargrove, who most recently worked on *Duke Nukem Forever* as a programmer, has left 3DRealms to join up with Legend. He will be helping out with *Unreal II*. Hargrove has also worked for Raven Software on *Heretic II*.



When you're online, you know how frustrating it is to get disconn

DISCONNECTED AGAIN. ENOUGH ALREADY.

There you are happily gaming online when you hear that one little word you know so well, "Good-bye." Suddenly, you're no longer firing a laser-guided rocket at the back of your buddy's head. Instead, you're left all alone with nothing but your thoughts to keep you company. And one thought in particular keeps popping up.



WHO DISCONNECTED ME AND WHERE DO THEY LIVE?

How are you going to get back at your Internet service provider for ending your session just when you were starting to have fun? A million interesting ideas run through your head but you won't settle for

anything less than the "piece de resistance." Anhh...you've got it. It's time to take action. It's time to make a call.

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Sprint

Prepare yourself for Runes, a brutal new third person action/adventure game steeped in the history of Norse mythology and Viking lore, built on the Unreal Tournament engine, and coming soon from Hummerhead Studios.

• WHIRLWIND THIRD PERSON MELEE ACTION • OVER 25 LEVELS AND OVER 15 DIFFERENT WEAPONS • UNIQUE MULTI-PLAYER ENVIRONMENTS INCLUDING DEATHMATCH, CAPTURE THE FLAG, AND UNIQUE NEW MELEE-BASED LEVELS

RUNES

IT WAS I, RAGNAR the mighty
murderer of battle-axe
SHIVER of blood AND MEN Foster
of MAGIC

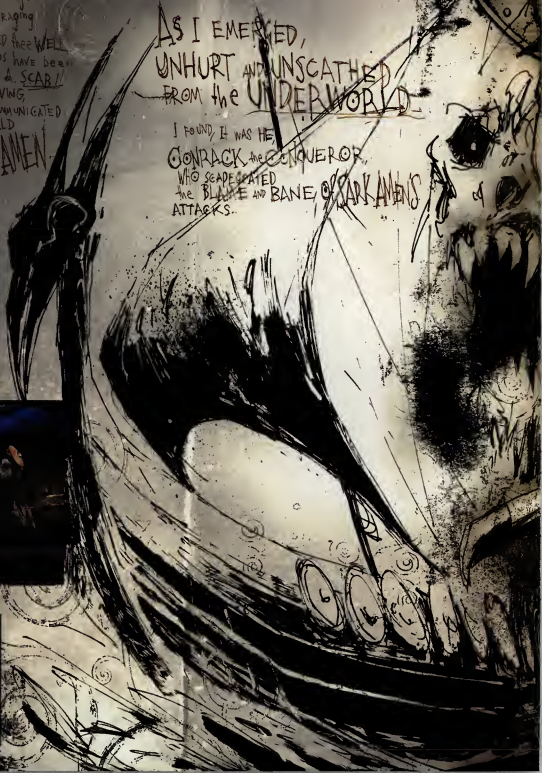
It has been want of light
and DECADENCE raging
since I last fired the WELL
THE VIKING (ANS) have been
ripped open like a SCAR
THE MARROW FLOWING
DARK SHADOWS excommunicated
FROM the Netherworld

by the
BESTIAL SARK ANEN.

WHEN FIRST I BORE ON AND SAW
the PILLAGE AND LOOTING
by those bound in EVIL,
I, RAGNAR the MIGHTY;
WIT IN KNEES IN
the MOST VIOLENT of ratches
after surveying the SIGHTS of
three-day spoils left
lying stretched AND MAIMED
in the FIELDS of BATTLE.

AS I EMERGED,
UNHURT AND UNSCATHED
FROM the UNDERWORLD.

I FOUND IT WAS HE
CONRACK the CONQUEROR,
WHO SCARCEATED
THE BLAME AND BANE OF SARK ANENS
ATTACKS.



"Its melee-intensive combat and absolutely evil visuals should put it a 'cut' above the rest" - IGN

"Prepare to be knocked flat on your ass by Rune from HumanHead Studios" - Incite

HIS city, torn AND MANGLED,
it was here I MET
AND Lopped the HEAD
of MY FIRST
DARK WARRIOR AND LEARNED
that MY VILLAGE AND PEOPLE
WERE to be the next SPOLLS
of

SARKAMEN'S WAR

IT IS HERE
MY QUEST TOOK FORM



MATURE (17+)
MILD ANIMATED VIOLENCE

MATURE
AGES 17+
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

PUBLISHED BY



DEVELOPED BY



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The Incredible Shrinking PC Box

Is standardization of PC game boxes finally here?

Does size really matter? PC videogame publishers seem to think so. While console

videogames have always had a standardized size (like PlayStation's jewel case), PC game publishers have toyed with the sizes and shapes of game boxes for years. It used to be that the bigger the box, the better the exposure on store shelves.

Well, all that is about to change. Spearheaded by Infogrames, Activision, and the Interactive Entertainment Merchant Association (IEMA), a for-profit conglomerate that represents 19 of the top 20 videogame retailers, PC videogame boxes are about to get smaller—roughly the height and length and triple the fatness of a DVD box, with a front gatefold that will allow ample room for graphics and game descriptions.

With key retailer Wal-Mart supporting the initiative with Infogrames and Activision, there will be an organized tent on store shelves. *Dear Hunter 4* and *Rocky Mountain Trophy Hunter 3*, from Infogrames, along with *Cabela's Big Game Hunter 4* and *Cabela's Grand Slam Hunting*, from Activision, have already been shipped to Wal-Mart in the new, smaller boxes. Other retailers will still receive the regular large boxes.

The reason behind this sudden shift in PC box size? Console gaming. As retailers gear up for next generation console videogames like Sony's PlayStation 2, Nintendo's Gamecube, and Microsoft's Xbox, retail shelf space has become critical real estate. The smaller box size will increase shelf space by 23 percent and will likely give more shelf space to smaller second-tier PC publishers.

"There's no downside to this change," says Hal Halpin, President of IEMA. "It's good for the PC games industry because it gives PC titles shelf space to face off against next generation consoles. Publishers will save money on shipping, distribution and warehousing." IEMA has high hopes for the new box size. Halpin adds, "By as early as January 1, 2001, the majority of PC games will have this new smaller box size."

Although some believe the smaller box size is expected to reduce PC game costs by as much as thirty percent, others don't think it will make such an impact. Beth Featherstone, the director of marketing at Microsoft, says, "The cost of packaging is miniscule in comparison to the cost of product development. Going to a smaller package will not significantly reduce a publisher's overall costs. I don't expect any price reductions as a result of smaller package size."

"We still see PC gaming as a very viable source of revenue," says Dusty Welch, director of global brand management at Activision. "We're spending a lot of extra money in this test to release the same game in different formats, but we believe this new box size is good for the PC games industry."

Wim Stocks, senior VP of sales and marketing at Infogrames, stressed that unity is an integral part of this change, "I, speaking as a publisher, require a smaller profile package is a very good thing, but only if the entire industry, meaning software publishers, retailers, and manufacturers, adopt a common standardized approach," he says.

In-store consumer education and awareness is imperative. The last thing PC game publishers want is to confuse customers. "It will be a challenge to communicate all the pertinent information, especially on complex games with lots of important features, but challenging is okay," says Mike Wilson, CEO of Gathering of Developers, who supports the smaller box size.

Microsoft, again, sees things differently. Featherstone says, "Microsoft believes a standard size package would be good for the industry, but we don't think it is necessarily a DVD-sized box." Microsoft prefers a box that has more room for manuals and other extras.

At the very least, PC gamers may finally have one thing that console gamers have always had: a game box that can be easily stored on a shelf.



NOW AND THEN

The Top-Selling Games Today...

Rank	Game and Publisher	PCG Rating
1	The Sims Livin' Large Electronic Arts	85%
2	The Sims Electronic Arts	96%
3	Age Of Empires II: Conquerors Microsoft	93%
4	Duino II Blizzard	94%
5	Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn Interplay	91%
6	Microsoft Plus Game Pack Microsoft	N/A
7	RollerCoaster Tycoon Hasbro Interactive	89%
8	PC Tycoon: Loney Landscapes Hasbro Interactive	N/A
9	Rainbow Six: Covert Ops Red Storm	N/A
10	Sim Theme Park Electronic Arts	73%

...And This Time Five Years Ago

Rank	Game and Publisher	PCG Rating
1	Mya Mattel Interactive	95%
2	Phantasmagoria Neves Interactive	88%
3	Doom II GT Interactive	90%
4	Ultimate Doom GT Interactive	N/A
5	Command & Conquer Electronic Arts	91%
6	MS Flight Simulator Microsoft	N/A
7	Need For Speed Electronic Arts	84%
8	MechWarrior II Activision	95%
9	Star Wars: Dark Forces LucasArts	92%
10	SimCity 2000 Electronic Arts	95%

THE PCG NEWS TICKER

Codemasters will be publishing *Operation Flashpoint*, a tactical combat action game from Bohemia Interactive Studios. The game takes place during the cold war and gives you control of a squad of 12 soldiers. It's slated for an early 2001 release.

Ben Smedstad, producer of *Baldur's Gate II: The Shadows of Amn*, has left BioWare to join up with Relic. He is now a producer for the *HomeWorld* team. So far, we've received no word on his reasons for leaving BioWare.

Monthlight has revealed that it is currently working on a mech game called *Tox Atomic's Big Bot Battles*. The action game will set its sights on the casual gamer audience and will be available as a download only. It will be running on the LithTech 2.5 engine.

A recent Interactive Digital Software Association survey shows that more adults than ever are gamers. 32 percent of Americans who play games are 35 or older and a whopping 60 percent of Americans play games.

THE PCG RELEASE METER

They just never come out fast enough, but maybe if you squint your eyes really hard, it'll look like the dates are earlier than they really are. Thanks to Rich LaPorte for putting together the list. Go to www.gonegold.com for the latest release dates. Please send news of release dates to laporte@gonegold.com.



TITLE	PUBLISHER	DATE	PROGNOSIS
November			
Battle Isle: The Andean War	Blue Byte	11/02/00	In the vicinity
Sheep	Empire	11/02/00	Abaaa-out now
Ford Racing	Empire	11/02/00	Green light
F1 Championship 2000	EA	11/02/00	Checked red flag
Arcetera	Ubisoft	11/02/00	Just a bit later
Resident Evil 3	Capcom	11/02/00	Creeching in
B-17 Flying Fortress 2	Hasbro	11/02/00	Flying in on one wing
Chessmaster 8000	Learning Co.	11/03/00	Checkmate
Riddle of the Sphinx	DreamCatcher	11/07/00	Sands say...maybe
Escape from Monkey Island	LucasArts	11/07/00	Don't be late, Guybrush!
Legend of the Blademasters	Ripcord	11/08/00	On the edge
Conquest Frontier Wars	Microsoft	11/10/00	Riding on a sick horse
Tiger Woods 2001	EA Sports	11/10/00	Teeling off
No One Lives Forever	FOX	11/10/00	Won't take forever
Heroes Chronicles: Masters	300	11/11/00	Heroically punctual
Heroes Chronicles: Clash	300	11/11/00	Same as above
Reno Air Racing	Broderbund	11/14/00	Flight's on time
MechWarrior 4	Microsoft	11/14/00	Positive tone
Starlark Command 2	Interplay	11/14/00	Highly probable
Call to Power 2	Activision	11/15/00	Hearing it soon
C&C: Renegade	Westwood	11/15/00	Delayed
Delta Force: Land Warrior	Novalogic	11/15/00	Tough going
Oregon Rider	Ubisoft	11/15/00	Flying in
Evil Dead: Hail to the King	THQ	11/15/00	Necromancer says maybe
I'm Going In	Eidos	11/16/00	Chances are good
Heist	Interplay	11/17/00	Should get away
Freedom: First Resistance	Red Storm	11/17/00	Revolution now!
Kingdom Under Fire	G.O.D.	11/17/00	Kingdom come
Issacs	Codemasters	11/21/00	Crazy and on time
American McGee's Alice	EA	11/22/00	I'm late, I'm late!
Silent Hunter 2	Mindscape	11/24/00	Expect delays
4x4 Evolution	G.D.D.	11/24/00	Rolls in
The Settlers IV	Blue Byte	11/28/00	Settling in soon
NBA Live 2001	EA Sports	11/28/00	He shoots, he scores!
F1 Grand Prix	Eidos	11/30/00	Peeling off
December			
Independence War 2	Infogrames	12/01/00	This month
Pool of Radiance	Mattel	12/02/00	Fortunes say yes
Star Trek: Away Team	Activision	12/02/00	Late again
EverQuest: Scars of Velious	Varent	12/15/00	Should be

CONTEST RULES

No purchase is necessary, and only one entry per household, per month, will be counted. Anyone can vote, but only U.S. residents are eligible to win prizes, and the offer is void in FL, RI, Puerto Rico, and where prohibited by law. Your chances of winning depend on the number of entries we receive.

More Power

Just don't confuse it with Sid Meier's Civilization

The sequel to *Civilization: The Call to Power* just went beta, and should be close to done by the time this issue is out. While the original *Call to Power* wasn't the huge hit Activision was hoping for, *Call to Power II* will hopefully be a marked improvement.

Once again, you will be able to take control of a civilization from the beginning of time and watch it grow all the way up to the year 2300. Like in the last game, you will manage all aspects of your civilization, including diplomacy, research, and war. *Call to Power II* uses the same engine as the first game, but expect some tweaks to add a little flourish to the game, such as new animations, and visible borders between countries.

Also expect improvements to the interface, new units, better AI, and plenty of tweaks to the gameplay in general. *Call to Power II* should be out right now.



Civilization Call to Power II is a separate series from the Sid Meier games.

WINNERS

Results of the Delta Force Contest

Here are the winners of our *Delta Force* giveaway contest. The winners each received copies of *Delta Force 1* and *Delta Force 2*, a .50 caliber dummy shirt, and a *Delta Force 2* T-shirt. The runner-ups received a T-shirt.

DELTA FORCE WINNERS:

Sean Steel
Aaron Felske
Hanley Ma
John Whelan
Michael Ames

DELTA FORCE RUNNER-UPS:

Rick McChristian
Brian L. Horle
Macklin Halsted
Bill Clay
Kathy Mulock

Thanks to Dan Bennett from Novalogic for providing us with the prizes. Be sure to check out the latest game in the series, *Delta Force: Land Warrior*, in stores now. Check out the screens below.





Icewind Dale: Heart of Winter

Let It Snow

Icewind Dale expands

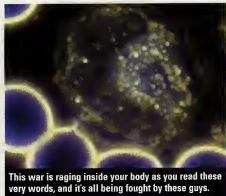
Black Isle Studios is currently hard at work on a brand spanking new expansion pack to *Icewind Dale*. Sporting new monsters, five new areas, and plenty of new spells, *Icewind Dale: Heart of Winter* gives players a whole new campaign based in the popular Forgotten Realms universe. Black Isle Studios is also bumping up the supported resolution to 800x600, and improving the OpenGL 3D support. Other goodies include new scroll cases and new gem bags. Some of the new creatures being added include the undead and polar worms. *Icewind Dale: Heart of Winter* requires the original *Icewind Dale* and is not a stand-alone product. Expect to see it on store shelves soon.

DESIGN LAB

Ivory Rebel

BY Joe Gehring FROM: Salem, OR CATEGORY: Action

Ivory Rebel is a first-person shooter where you are a white blood cell waging war against an army of invading viruses. You start with a simple Aspirin shooter and get stronger weapons as the game progresses. Later on, you'll learn special skills to better combat the viruses. Your character can also upgrade himself to T-Cell mode where he becomes faster and stronger. You'll have access to certain vehicles including a red blood cell hover board that will help you get to different parts of the body faster through the bloodstreams. An army of white blood cells are at your command and will support you when you need them. You have full strategic control over them and can give orders on when to attack.



This war is raging inside your body as you read these very words, and it's all being fought by these guys.

Got a great game idea of your own? Send them in to eyewitness@pcgamer.com with "Design Lab" in the subject heading, and we may just print your idea!

PRAY TO YOUR GOD. PRAY FOR YOUR LIFE. PRAY FOR MERCY. PRAY TILL YOUR KNEES BLEED.

BLAIR WITCH VOLUME I BY JUSTIN PARR
SEPTEMBER 2009

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GREAT GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED

A look at small time games that deserve big time attention. Here's where we give the "Independent" game industry a chance to be seen. If you know any recent games that belong here, send in an E-mail to eyewitness@pcgamer.com with "Ever Heard Of?" in the subject heading.

Infantry

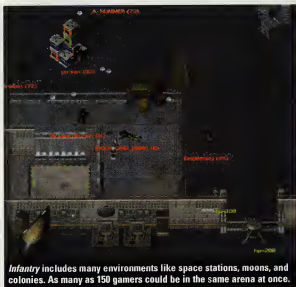
- Harmless Games
- Find it at: www.infantryzone.com

Infantry is a futuristic tactical combat game that doesn't bother with flashy 3D graphics or effects. Instead, its focus is on multiplayer action with tons of features. Played from a simple top-down 2D perspective, *Infantry* lets up to 150 people play at the same time in a single arena. Each arena is linked by a portal, which means that you could potentially be connected to thousands of gamers at a time. You select your character type from the usual suspects, including medics, drivers, mechanics, heavy weapons soldiers, commanders, and more.

There are also dozens of vehicles available such as buggies, bikes, hover boards, and tanks. One of the coolest features is the chance to

drive in multi-man vehicles where up to four different players can use the same ride. Each assumes different roles, one gunner, one driver, one electronic warfare guy, and more, depending on the vehicle.

Harmless Games, the developer, plans to add in an RPG element where your character can gain experience and skills. There are more than 200 weapons to play with and tons of special items as well as a set of psionic attacks. Currently, *Infantry* is available for a free download at www.infantryzone.com.



Infantry includes many environments like space stations, moons, and colonies. As many as 150 gamers could be in the same arena at once.

I AM THE ONLY ONE WHO HEARS YOUR CRIES. I AM THE ONLY ONE WHO FEELS YOUR PAIN.
YOU WILL FEEL MINE.

BLAIR WITCH VOLUME II: THE LEGEND OF COFFIN ROCK
OCTOBER 2000

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Start Freeloading

Freeloader.com heads to the United States, and gives us Yanks a chance to play for free

It's so simple. Give away quality grade-A games for free, and have advertisers pay to display their banners while you're downloading them. That's the basic concept behind www.freeloader.com. And you know what? It's working...in Europe, that is. [Freeloader.com](http://www.freeloader.com) is wildly successful in the good 'ol UK, and now they're hoping to repeat that success all over the world. By the time you read this, there should be [Freeloader.com](http://www.freeloader.com) branches in France, Germany, and right here in the U.S. of A.

Now, this isn't some lame website that gives away *Tetris* clones. These guys give away actual

games. Currently, titles such as *Hidden & Dangerous* (hugely popular in the UK) and *Grand Theft Auto 2* are on their list of games available for you to download, with more on the way. Also, [Freeloader.com](http://www.freeloader.com) has some in-house developers creating exclusive games that will only be available on their site. But what about downloads? Everyone knows that games are huge, and most people out there are still chugging away on 56k modems. [Freeloader.com](http://www.freeloader.com) has found a work-around for this with their DigiCutter technology. DigiCutter slices up games and divides them into smaller, download-friendly episodes. These episodes

can be downloaded and then played one at a time, and linked whenever you feel like it. Episodes will end in places that make sense; so you won't be cut off in the middle of a mission in *Hidden & Dangerous*.

All you have to do to get in on the goods is register at www.freeloader.com and answer a questionnaire. That's it. You won't get spammed, and the purpose of the questionnaire is for the company to customize the ads for you. Basically, if you say you're into snowboarding, you'll see ads related to that. These ads then appear when you're downloading the game. Get in on the free goodies at www.freeloader.com.



Hidden & Dangerous is just one of the many games [freeloader.com](http://www.freeloader.com) has available for free.



Halcyon Sun is a space action game being developed in-house by [freeloader.com](http://www.freeloader.com).



[Freeloader.com](http://www.freeloader.com) has games for all tastes, including Jimmy White's 2: Cueball.

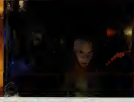
IT HAS GROWN STRONGER SINCE THE LAST TIME IT CALLED. OR HAVE I GROWN WEAKER? MY BLOOD STILL RUNS RED, BUT THIS POISON RUNS DEEPER. ALL MY HATRED MUST FIND A PLACE TO REST.

BLAIR WITCH VOLUME III: THE ELLY KEDWARD TALE
NOVEMBER, 2000

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An Avenging Angel



The alien Catteni forces have crushed Earth. Humanity has been enslaved. All hope is lost, until a defiant Angel Sanchez and her band of rebels appear on the scene to exact revenge and take back the planet. Join Angel in the fight to restore FREEDOM — at any price!

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R.I.P. Babylon 5

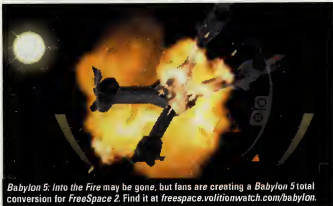
We know that some of you hate to hear it, but it's finally over for *Babylon 5*

While the *Babylon 5* game was cancelled by Sierra a year ago (after moving its development from Oakhurst, CA, to Seattle), fans of the series banded together to try and revive the floundering title. Headed by a website called *FirstOnes.com*, this highly dedicated and fairly large group of *B5* enthusiasts has done everything within its power to get Havas Interactive to reconsider its decision.

Sadly, Richard Brewer, the CEO of Sector 14 Studios (the development house that hoped to get the existing assets of *Babylon 5: Into the Fire*), recently informed *FirstOnes.com* that they are unable to get the license. Brewer says, "It is not due to problems with Sector 14 Studios, nor is it due to lack of interest by publishers, or lack of funding, but rather the current holder of the materials recently informed us they were no longer

interested in selling the game assets. Appeals to the highest levels of management at Havas in France were not able to change their stance."

FirstOnes.com still plans to try and bring *B5: Into the Fire* back to life, but with these recent developments things aren't looking too good. Brewer wants fans to know that he'd like to get feedback on their thoughts. He can be E-mailed at sector14studios@yahoo.com.



Babylon 5: Into the Fire may be gone, but fans are creating a *Babylon 5* total conversion for *FreeSpace 2*. Find it at freespace.vollitionwatch.com/babylon.



For more information about the cancellation of *Babylon 5*, see the *Eyewitness* story that ran in our March 2000 issue.



Blair Witch Volume I: Rustin Parr
Rustin Parr combines traditional adventure elements such as research, exploration and puzzle-solving with a healthy dose of heart-pounding action to create a frighteningly cerebral gaming experience.



Blair Witch Volume II: The Legend of Coffin Rock
Human Head Studios infuses the power of Nuncurme technology with Resident Evil-style game play, making *The Legend of Coffin Rock* a uniquely satisfying jump through hell on Earth.



Blair Witch Volume III: The Elly Kedward Tale
The *Elly Kedward Tale* focuses on action and will feature a spell-based combat system.

BLAIR WITCH™

Gathering of Developers proudly announces a three-game series based on the rich mythology behind the blockbuster film, *The Blair Witch Project*. Haxan Films has granted unprecedented access to its wealth of intricate folklore, providing developers Terminal Reality, Human Head Studios and Ritual Entertainment with ample fodder for detailed and compelling storylines. These chilling narratives are powered by the awe-inspiring Nocturne™ engine, creating infinite opportunities for masterful suspense and blood-curdling Nocturne.



THE PCG PLAYLIST

Thanks to the *Firearms* mod for *Half-Life*, this issue barely made it out. It all started so innocently. Li came in one day and said, "Hey, check this out. It's like a mix of *Team Fortress Classic* and *Counterstrike*." The next thing we knew, deadline was upon us, and we'd done nothing but clock in countless hours playing a mod for a two-year-old game.



ROB No *Firearms* for me, hence you're actually getting to read this issue! *Elite Force's* length meant I actually got to finish a game — and what a thoroughly entertaining experience it was. The pile of "games to play" gets longer, with *FAK2*, *BGII*, and *Crimson Skies* joining *Deus Ex*. One day...

LISA I've been caught up in the hype of *Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force* this month, and I haven't had this much fun playing an FPS since *Half-Life*. This game is so good, I might even start watching the TV show now! Too bad that game didn't come out until "Voyager" hit its last season.



DAN *Firearms* kicks ass. That's a mod for *Half-Life*, by the way. Find it at www.firearmsmod.com. I am an absolute terrorist with the Heckler & Koch PSG-1 sniper rifle (note to politicians: a virtual terrorist, not an actual one). *NHL 2001* is also here...mmm, ice shavings. Did you know that blood bounces on ice?

CHUCK But those other guys blathered on about their precious *Firearms* mod, huh? Okay, I'm playing it, too, but wait...there's more! Because you're reading this right now, I'll throw in the most excellent *Elite Force* and *Blair Witch: Rustin Parr*. Why, I'd have to be crazy to play any more games, right? Well, I am! There's *DIII* and...um...*DIII*.



LI It's all my fault. I first found the *Firearms* mod on a disc we got from Sierra, then I downloaded the most recent version. That was the beginning of the end. Now we're all addicted. I can't go a single day without my fix. To make matters worse, I'm not even very good at it! Damn Williams and his AUG.

JEREMY Did someone mention *Firearms*? I'm afraid it's a scene of conformity here at the *PC Gamer* offices. I'm more than happy to join in, though. The mod is an excellent balance of arcade goofiness and realism. Plus nothing brings me more joy than kicking ass with my AUG. Bring on the next version!



JOE I've forgotten all about *Team Fortress Classic*. Like everyone else, I've been playing *Firearms*. I found out a sure way to win at that game: always be on Jeremy's team. I've also managed to get my hands on a copy of *NHL 2001*. After spending half a day creating my team, I think I'm ready to hit the rink.

CHIAKI Attack! Attack! Kill Kill I did it! I finally beat *WarCraft III*! Soooooo good. I bit and clawed my way through 14 tough levels. So it took me a month, and I offended everyone around me by my not-so-lady-like mouth...I don't care 'cause I beat it. Now on to *StarCraft*. Does anyone have a umm...er...Mac version?



GREG This month I played a hell of a lot of *Elite Force*. It's not the longest game in the world, but damn, it's fun! Try not to be scared away if you aren't a *Trek* fan — I'm not really one, either. The game is fantastic on its own merits, regardless of its setting. If you haven't tried it yet, you're missing out.

Global Rankings Kicks In

NetGames USA gets some stiff competition

A new online ranking system is now on the web and actively tracking your frags. Simply called Global Rankings, this new statistics system is being used by MPlayer as you read this very sentence. Similar to the NetStats software used in *Unreal Tournament* and developed by NetGames USA (which was recently acquired by Microsoft), Global Rankings automatically tracks and records your scores and keeps them stored in an online database.

At press time, Global Rankings technology is integrated into the 1.25 beta patch release for *Quake III: Arena*, and it will be supporting *Starfleet Command Volume II*, and *Aliens vs. Predator Gold Edition* very soon. One of the biggest draws of Global Rankings is its unified ranking system, which tracks statistics regardless of location or platform. You can then check out how you compare against other gamers from all over the world, PC and console. For example, players of *Unreal Tournament* on the PlayStation 2 (tee-hee) can see how they match up with PC gamers.

Global Rankings provides player and team rankings based on a chess-style rating system or a ladder system. It supports user created leagues, and can keep track of your games regardless of if you're playing on MPlayer, another matching service, or your own independently-run multiplayer game.

Various leading game publishers have signed on to use the software, and the companies themselves decide what stats to track and record. Find out more about Global Rankings at www.globalrankings.com.



Quake III: Arena is one of the first games to use the Global Rankings system.



Global Rankings can keep track of any statistic you want it to, from hit percentage to frags.

NEXT MONTH

The Sixth Annual PC Gamer Strategy Blowout

Beat all the top games (or at least learn how to beat them, or improve your current skills) with *PC Gamer's* top tips. We conclude the mammoth *Baldur's Gate II* walkthrough, give you the lowdown on how to get the most from the new units in *C&C: Red Alert 2*, and will make a successful air pirate out of you with a complete *Crimson Skies* strategy. But that's not all: we'll have full strategies of all the hottest games of the moment, including *Blair Witch: Rustin Parr*, *NHL 2001*, *Madden 2001*, *Rune*, and *No One Lives Forever*. And when the strategies aren't enough, you can always cheat with our massive collection of the best in hints, tips, codes, and low-down dirty cheats. But you have to wait until next month!

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An actual in-game scene from *Planetside*, the world's first massively multiplayer first-person shooter.



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THE WORLD WEB WAR

With a flood of massively multi-player games heading to market — each capable of supporting hundreds or thousands of players simultaneously — which will get your gaming dollar? Join us for a sneak peak at the contenders.

MEET THOUSANDS OF NEW PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD | ...AND THEN **KILL THEM.**

PC GAMER December 2000 65

evolution is a good thing. Every once in a while, a new idea takes hold of an established system and lays waste to the old ways, while kick-starting a new charge in different and exciting directions.

For gaming, a revolution has arrived, one as profound as the shift from board games to computers. Massively multiplayer games, which involve thousands (and potentially millions) of players in a single-game world, promise to expand the gameplay experience and stretch it to new, previously unimaginable levels of social interaction. Take on quests in an ancient medieval realm, cope with a techno-bleak near-future Earth, or challenge the boundaries of deep space: a new crop of games offers something for everyone. Which will get your gaming dollar?



"This is a stick-up! Give me \$9.95 per month or your life."



The future of online gaming or an episode of "MTV's Spring Break Dance Party?" You decide.

MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER = MASSIVE MONEYMAKER

The long-awaited *Ultima Online* was the first mainstream online-only game to hit the shelves, and despite its serious birthing pains it gathered players by the tens of thousands. *EverQuest* came soon after and proved to be the Krakatoa of the genre, outshining *UO* with its awe-inspiring 3D graphics and simple player-developing goals, as well as cementing the validity of an online-only persistent game world. Microsoft smelled money and released *Asheron's Call*, quickly making it apparent that this new genre brought in thousands of players, and perhaps more importantly, millions of dollars on a regular basis.



EverQuest and *Ultima Online's* success provide the models for commercial success in online games.

WAR OF THE WORLDS

In the next couple of years, a host of new online worlds will pop up on the horizon. Gamers will explore fascinating new lands together, whether arm in arm or armed for battle. Will it be on the distant planet of Neo Eden, where a colony of convicts begins their own *Blade Runner*-like civilization, or on the fields of Avalon in *The Dark Age of Camelot*, or perhaps near *Star Wars'* Coruscant — with a light saber at one's side? There will be many choices (assuming each of them manages to get the funding to see full production), all of them alluring, and so we offer you a look at these locations not just as gamers previewing things to come, but also as travel agents to the worlds that are prepared to do battle for your presence and pocketbook.

Planetside looks like it will be one of the best looking and certainly most innovative new online games released next year.

Planetside

> ■ **DEVELOPER:** Verant ■ **PUBLISHER:** Sony ■ **WEBSITE:** www.verant.com ■ **RELEASE DATE:** Summer 2001
■ **IT'S LIKE:** *Quake* to the 10th power ■ **HOW MANY SIMULTANEOUS PLAYERS:** Thousands

The world's first massively multiplayer, persistent-universe first-person shooter is almost ready for rollout from the masters of online gaming, Verant Interactive. We've got the exclusive first look at *Planetside*, a pioneering game that will bring gaming's most thrilling genre to a huge new global stage.

So it's you and about 30,000 strangers trying to kill you. You've got a small band of homeboys on whom you can depend for fire support. There's a corporation for which you work, and they'll give you the basic amenities as long as you keep paying them their 20 percent skim. The weapons being used against you are the cutting edge of the far future's most finely-developed killing technology. And did I mention that your taxes are almost due?

This is *Planetside*, the first-ever massively multiplayer (MM)/persistent-world first-person shooter (FPS). And coming from the hallowed halls of *EverQuest*'s Verant Interactive, expectations in our office are very high.

MERCENARY ATTITUDE

Planetside is set in a far future of relentless warfare and cut-throat competition between mega-corporations. Starting from the safety of a corporate-controlled home city, you will take on freelance assignments, form up long-term alliances

with permanent teammates or just attach yourself to ad hoc "parties," and then venture out into the demilitarized zones to accomplish your missions.

The basic idea, according to lead designer Kevin McCann, is to put players in the role of "mercenaries or worse." You play as a member of a near-lawless futuristic society where life is cheap and ammo is expensive. Seeking to make a living the only way still possible, you'll farm yourself out as a hired trigger in service of one of four massive mega-corporations. The corporate parent will provide you with basic housing, arsenal, and support, in exchange for a cut of all the cash you earn in the field.



It may be a persistent world, but you'll still be filling bodybags at a fast rate.



< COVER STORY >

KILL, MAIM, and BLOW STUFF UP.

(and race too.)



ALL THE MAYHEM, CHAOS, AND CARNAGE IS BACK WITH CARMAGEDDON TDR 2000. WITH A BRAND NEW 3D ENGINE THAT DELIVERS STUNNING VISUALS WITH DYNAMIC PHYSICS AND DEFORMING MESH TECHNOLOGY, YOU CAN PULP ALL THE ZOMBIES, MUTANTS, AND LAWYERS YOU CAN SET YOUR SIGHTS ON. THE ALL NEW CAMPAIGN MODE LETS YOU TRAVERSE OVER 30 LEVELS BY CRUSHING CARS, MAKING ROAD KILL, OR RACING TO THE FINISH. HOWEVER YOU PLAY, BUCKLE UP, CALL THE CORONER, AND PUT ON YOUR CLEAN UNDERWEAR: IT'S GONNA BE A WILD RIDE.



SCI

CARMAGEDDON TDR 2000

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Vehicles are a key element. You'll be able to drive them around, fire their weapons independently, and generally raise hell.

Planetside works off a reward system that encourages you to stick with one character (no matter how many times the guy may get fragged). The idea is to develop this character over time and watch him evolve and expand.

"It's got certain elements of Roleplaying Lite," says McCann, "though I want to emphasize Lite."

Your character has a Citizenship rank that will increase as you accomplish things in the persistent gameworld. With improving citizenship status, you'll be granted access to new

and better tech implants and be allowed to explore new gameplay variations and play modes.

The first order of business when you initially sign on to *Planetside* will be to ally yourself with a corporation. There are four, specializing respectively in military, scientific research, technological, and mining focuses. Each grants members specific abilities tailored to the corp's focus. You'll reside in the corporation's home city, where guns don't affect people and everyone is safe from malicious player-killing. In the home

city, you'll have your own personal apartment (where you'll begin most play sessions, and which includes a terminal where you can read forums, get gossip, and choose assignments).

When you're a green recruit, you'll be eased into play with a variety of simple, tutorial-style job offers. As you build cash flow and experience points, you'll also get on-the-job education on how to use *Planetside*'s many vehicles and heavy weapons. Mission types run a wide gamut: courier service, recon, patrols, and convoy interception to name just a few. Successful completion of these missions will confer advances within the corporate structure and new privileges.

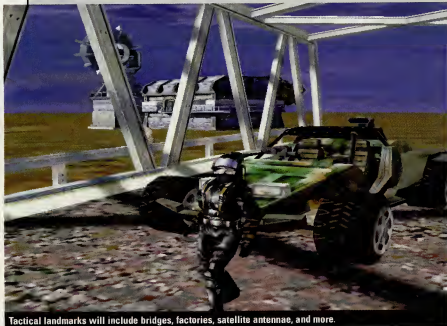
But it's important to note that you'll be expected to die many, many times while all of this is going on. *Planetside* most definitely adheres to the frag-a-ton philosophy of FPS design, so prepare to get whacked dozens, if not hundreds, of times. And yet, the structure of this persistent-world FPS always encourages long-running character development. There's very little penalty for getting wasted...you have to restart without the gear you'd amassed in the field, but there's really no other downside.

KNOW YOUR FRIENDS

Life's hard in this world, so it will be in your best interest to find some backup. If you're the organized, team-player type, you can join up with a persistent Registered Outfit. A clan in every respect, these crews will function with an Outfit Leader and subordinate hierarchy, and can accept and execute assignments as a semi-autonomous group.

Temporary outfits can also be cobbled together on a "per session" basis by freelance players who don't want to be bothered with a full-time roster slot. Since most missions will require some kind of team coordination, you'll be able to form temp crews to take on individual jobs and then disband when you're done for the day.

The staging ground for all team activity will be your corporation's home city, or else it will be out in one of the Sanctuaries. The universe of *Planetside* is structured around "continents" measuring about 8 km by 8 km.



Tactical landmarks will include bridges, factories, satellite antennae, and more.



< COVER STORY >



These continents vary wildly in terrain type — almost every conceivable world-type will be seen, from jungle to desert to forest to tundra — but the strategic Sanctuaries are all the same. These fortified towns exist within a defensive perimeter where no violence is allowed; you'll get gunlocks slapped on your weapons as soon as you enter. Sanctuaries are corporation-neutral, so they serve as marketplaces, business hubs where usual corporate rivals can barter and buy each other's gear.

McCann and his St. Louis, MO-based design team are looking at every possible way to provide compelling reasons for large numbers of strangers to cooperate and wage large-scale battles. The only real way, of course, is to provide a self-serving incentive for these massive efforts: thus the idea of Sanctuary influence. If dozens of players can organize the invasion and take-over of the bases surrounding a Sanctuary, they'll all reap the rewards (and revel in the glory) of economic advantage within that Sanctuary.

Using such tricks, McCann hopes for large-scale strategic battles to occur naturally in the gameworld.

"We really have to justify a pay-to-play model," says McCann. "The best way is to make the game's persistent evolution really matter for the players in gameplay terms."

ON DEATH AND DYING

Any first-person shooter involves dying a heap of times and *PlanetSide* is no different. But McCann and company are going to make sure that there's

tary weapons, armor, and vehicles each time you go out. This way, you'll always have a minimum of firepower and protection for each new foray into the wilderness.

Thankfully, *PlanetSide* will not drag you across wildernesses the way *EverQuest* does: you get to hop into transporters that whisk you immediately off to another continent and another potentially deadly firefight.



So what will it actually be like out there in the battlegrounds? The answer, simply, is hectic.

nothing excessively frustrating about getting fraggged.

Since you can expect most of your valuable gear to be looted, there won't be many items so expensive or rare that their loss will be anything to cry about. "Getting killed repeatedly within a short time frame can be frustrating enough without losing several days' earnings in the process," says McCann.

Your corporation will ease the pain as well, by outfitting you with rudimen-

THE KILLING FIELDS

So what will it actually be like out there in *PlanetSide*'s hotly-contested battlegrounds? The answer, simply, is hectic.

With each server supporting upward of 3,000 players, spread out over perhaps eight continents per server, you're going to be looking at densely populated warzones. As teams pursue the completion of their jobs, competing teams from enemy corporations will be ordered to oppose them.

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YOU CAN BARELY HEAR
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For example, if a team from Corporation A is assigned to protect a convoy of minerals as it travels from one Sanctuary to another, a team from Corp B may very well be assigned to intercept that convoy. Thus, a team of 10-12 players will be thrown into combat with a team of 10-12 players from the rival corp, all of them human players collaborating for a massive showdown.

So far, this doesn't sound like anything we couldn't do in *Tribes*, right?

But wait. The genius of *Planetside* is that the results of this geographical melee matter in the persistent universe; whether or not a convoy reaches its destination will have a definite impact on the economic balance of the region, at least for the time being.

But even beyond the missions and counter-missions, the environments will be just plain lethal. The *Planetside* servers will continually analyze each continent for lapses in action and will automatically generate distress in quiet areas...so if the forest around your nice, peaceful base stays peaceful too long, you can bet the server will scrounge up a new Solanite Crystal deposit or other critical objective to lure trouble to the scene.

"We want to be sure there are always free-form activities to be doing," says McCann. "To be able to jump in, play for a bit, and get out will be a nice thing."

So rest easy, all you trigger-heads who are getting nervous about the depth of the game. It will be fully possible for you to log on, walk out into the environment,

and start deathmating with no mission, team, or goal to worry about. Somewhere nearby, you can be assured, there are enemies waiting to throw down.

The tools of warfare will be what McCann calls "futuristic conventional" — he cites the movie *Aliens* as a chief influence on the look and feel of

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Verant has learned a thing or two about running a MM game, with *EverQuest* continuing to draw big profits. A bit surprisingly, there is no one on the *Planetside* development team who has even remotely involved with the creation of *EverQuest*; *Planetside* will use



"We're the only company that could seriously attempt this."

— Kevin McCann, Lead Designer

weapons, armor, and vehicles. Instead of laser beams and particle weapons, *Planetside* will stick to the hard nuts and bolts, offering variations of machine-guns, shell-firing cannon, and missiles.

A big element of the game will be vehicles, which are essential for travel over rough terrain and for speedily carrying you back into the fight. The vehicle we got to see in action was an armored, gun-equipped dune buggy (which looked, I must say, like it had jumped right out of *Halo*). The physics of *Planetside* are much more "action-conscious" than thuddingly realistic, so the buggies handle like vehicles from an arcade racer.

All these puzzle pieces will hopefully fit together into a battlefield that is dense and deep for those intrigued by the strategic possibilities of a persistent battleground, but still hot and fast-paced for those seeking mindless violence on the massively multiplayer scale.

no legacy network code (mainly due to the differences required in powering a turn-based RPG against the packet-pushing needs of a first-person shooter) and is essentially being built from the ground up as a completely new entity.

However, Verant is Verant, and all the lessons of running a successful server-based persistent-world game have been learned well. Verant's customer service wing is a huge, buzzing hub, and a brand new wing will be added to provide the support for *Planetside*'s servers. Verant's national and international server network is in place already, and McCann expects his bleeding-edge network code to handle the considerable challenge of moving lots of data quickly enough to provide a smooth MM shooter.

"We're the only company that could seriously attempt this," says McCann. "We know a lot of people will be watching us, taking notes. We're really going

to set a standard here that I think a lot of people are eventually going to be following."

For years now — well, ever since massively multiplayer games began to develop as a serious topic of discussion — we've dreamed of a global-scale, persistent-world FPS.

Maybe it was academic that someone would someday make one. But the fact that it's finally here, and that it's in the hands of a big-league outfit like Verant, with such a huge established hit in the field, is just plain thrilling. We can hardly wait for summer, when Verant hopes to roll out the game.

We'll see you in the trenches.



Environments range from forest to desert to jungle to tundra, including this green cheese moon-like landscape.

Characters of all shapes and sizes just can't wait to begin playing large-scale Dungeons & Dragons over the Internet.

Neverwinter Nights

> **DEVELOPER:** BioWare **PUBLISHER:** Interplay **WEBSITE:** www.neverwinternights.com **RELEASE DATE:** Early 2001
IT'S LIKE: The magic of D&D — online. **HOW MANY SIMULTANEOUS PLAYERS:** 8-64 per server

Sitting around a table with greasy dice and bottles of RC Cola, staring at the Dungeon Masters Guide and hoping you roll a 20, is a thrill you'll get to play out on a large scale through the miracle of modern technology and every roleplayer's good friend, BioWare. Although there is a full-length single player game, the multiplayer element of NWN will be so expansive

that it migrates into massively multiplayer territory. Designed from the ground up using the Dungeons and Dragons 3rd Edition rules, the game will allow you to create your own 3D worlds using built-in tools specifically designed to make adventure construction truly easy. Large libraries of stock resources (buildings, dungeons, and terrain) as well as a scripting language for plot and dialogue will be provided. Once you're done putting your world together, you can not only open it up for online players to adventure in, but you can

link it through in-game "portals" to other NWN servers — creating the potential for massive online communities of connected servers.

For gamers more interested in playing the online adventure than running their own game, certain checks will be implemented so that 50th level characters don't become the norm. You will have the choice of playing a non regulated character, or a sanctioned "vault" character. Vault characters are stored in the Character Vault server, where they are run through filters based on time outside the server to limit the XP and equipment gains. Characters that leave a server at 10th level only to return dubiously the same day at 16th level will be stripped of some of their experience points to even them out. This should make Vault characters something to respect, since players (and DMs) will know that their stats were earned honestly.

Either way you play, all of the magic one would expect from the creators of *Baldur's Gate* will be included — mages will have familiar, dual-weapon fighting is implemented, over 200 spells will be available, and 50 different monster models (with variants) will populate the dungeons. You'll also be able to import your *Baldur's Gate 2* character, although it will be stripped down to 1st level if you want him to be a Vault character.

YOU'LL BE SURE TO ENJOY: Neverwinter.net: the player matching service. The massive online community preparing for NWN's release. Huge, powerful, 3D dragons.

Beware: Vampire: TM — Redemption's "online community" didn't really take off...

How about that engine?
Check out the shadow effects.



Remember, the bigger they fall, the harder they fall.

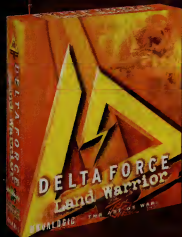
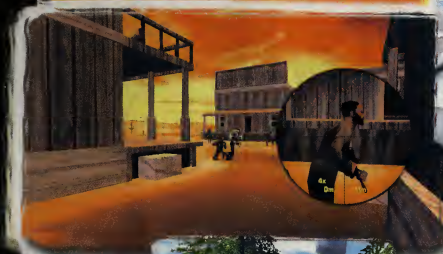


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DECLARE YOUR ALLEGIANCE. NOW.



The prison planet of Neo Eden awaits you. The bad news is that you have total amnesia. The good news is that you've got one helluva sweet ride.

BigWorld: Citizen Zero

> ■ **DEVELOPER:** MicroForte ■ **PUBLISHER:** MicroForte ■ **WEBSITE:** www.microforte.com.au/bigworld/
 ■ **RELEASE DATE:** Early 2002 ■ **IT'S LIKE:** *Blade Runner* meets *No Escape* ■ **NOW MANY SIMULTANEOUS PLAYERS:** 10-20,000

Set on Neo Eden, a former prison planet whose inmates rose up against their guards and sent them packing, *BigWorld* is a science-fiction setting in which you have two basic goals: discover who you are and integrate yourself into a turbulent developing civilization.

After eliminating the prison's administrators, strong organizations of former inmates called "Overarchs," quickly formed and took control, turning the massive former prison into the capitol of a new civilization. These powerful factions are the principle axes around which the social worlds of the game spin, as they constantly struggle against each other for control of the city.

As an inmate, you have had your memory erased and you have been implanted with an Ident-Chip. These chips place certain restrictions on your activities and movements—a remnant from when the planet was still a prison colony.

However, you will be an "Alpha" (nicknamed Zeros), people who find that they are gradually able to overcome the chip's influence. As you do this, you will be able to enter new areas and gain new powers, and also start to recall memories from your former life before arriving on Neo Eden. As an Alpha, your ability to go places other inmates can't will make you a valuable commodity—and will serve as a basis for their being constantly hired by the Overarchs.

The Overarchs are almost characters unto themselves, complete with their own equipment inventory, physical headquarters, and missions. The more you do for your Overarch, the more new equipment, better missions, and special training will become available. As each member helps it gain size and status, all of its membership will begin to enjoy the fruits of that labor, including dipping into the pool of shared equipment and money, gaining personal renown based on their standing within the

group, helping to requisition a larger (and more impressive) headquarters, and eventually being able to purchase extremely rare items only available to Overarch luminaries.

It is the interaction between Overarchs that provides the basis for the missions offered to you, so there will be an astounding variety of tasks to accomplish. Stealing, assassination, bribery, recruitment,



Gaining new abilities makes you more valuable to the Overarchs.



The game world is immense and not just a little "Blade Runner"-ish.



This isn't your older brother's massively multi-player game. Check out those graphics!

protection, as well as trade and player-generated bounties amongst these organizations will create perpetual mission requirements. So much for the days when "3D online RPG" meant watching your character sit online at spawn points.

The missions themselves will be automatically tailored to your individual talents and might require additional help to complete. For instance, a hacker may be hired to open a security door so that a soldier, hired for the same mission, can go through the now open door and clean out the surprised inhabitants. By collaborating, this system allows you to accomplish both fast jobs or longer, more sophisticated missions, depending on how much time you want to spend online. As you succeed in missions, you will not only receive your payment, but your Renown attribute will increase. As it rises, new options will open up, like instant access to exclusive clubs that bouncers had previously barred you from entering, or being contacted by powerful organizations for special quests. Your actions will constantly affect your standing with both friends and enemies, creating a web of connections and relationships that will define you as much as your statistics and items.

In case you are not interested in forming relationships, one of the more unique aspects of *BigWorld* is its ability to offer a traditional single-player experience. You'll begin in *BigWorld* with amnesia, so you can simply focus on the lengthy task of freeing yourself from the control of the Ident-Chip and discovering your past. You'll have a clear and individual goal that can be reached at your own pace by developing your character through missions and exploration. Hell, who needs friends anyway?

YOU'LL BE SURE TO ENJOY: Getting your own apartment, just like every starting player. Piloting vehicles. Chatting with other players with an IRC-like CommunParson. Keeping all your items when you die.

BEWARE! Extremely ambitious title with 2002 release date. Every character has a back-story!

Just the beginning...

Rumor and speculation surrounds many prominent persistent world games. Here's what we know about some of the big names allegedly in development.

STAR WARS ONLINE

DEVELOPER Verant
PUBLISHER LucasArts
RELEASE DATE Late 2001

WHAT WE KNOW The developers are sequestered away in Verant's San Diego office unable to breach a word about their plans and focus for what is already the most hotly anticipated MMRPG. An all-new engine is a guarantee, and no doubt the character models and animations will be beyond the level of detail seen in any of the current generation of persistent world games. We can't wait.

STAR TREK ONLINE

DEVELOPER TBD
PUBLISHER Activision
RELEASE DATE TBD

WHAT WE KNOW Nothing! Activision is certainly pursuing the possibility of a *Star Trek* persistent world game (and had discussed options with Verant), but the exact focus (planet- or space-based) is still undecided and no developer is currently attached to the project.

THE SIMS ONLINE

DEVELOPER Maxis
PUBLISHER EA
RELEASE DATE TBD

WHAT WE KNOW Not much is known at this point about *The Sims Online*, though it is certainly in development. Will Wright, the creator of *SimCity* and *The Sims*, is personally leading the design effort. (This is significant because, although he's involved with all Sim-related projects at Maxis, not all of them are designed by Wright himself.) A public beta is planned to begin in the second half of 2001 for release possibly at the end of the year.

D&D LICENSE

DEVELOPER TBD
PUBLISHER Hasbro Interactive
RELEASE DATE TBD

WHAT WE KNOW Hasbro has the powerful D&D and Magic: The Gathering licenses in its stable, and although the company has no official word on any specific products in development, it's known to be investigating numerous options with their properties. Interplay's *Neverwinter Nights* will likely fill the 'table-top' roleplaying game play void that *Vampire* nearly filled, but that shouldn't put off an official product with the brand identity available in TSR's back catalog of titles.

EARTH AND BEYOND

DEVELOPER Westwood
PUBLISHER EA
RELEASE DATE Late 2001

WHAT WE KNOW Westwood is rumored to be deep in development on a bold new online game franchise. What we know is that it's spacing-banished. We also know we'll have more news on this coming soon.

EVERQUEST 2

DEVELOPER Verant
PUBLISHER Sony Online Entertainment
RELEASE DATE 2002

WHAT WE KNOW Albeit an unconfirmed rumor, a sequel is a no-brainer. What is perhaps a little surprising is that we understand it's been in development for several months already, but may not ship for two years.

FREELANCER ONLINE

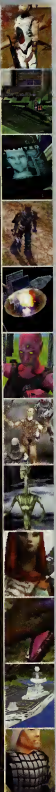
DEVELOPER Digital Anvil
PUBLISHER Microsoft
RELEASE DATE Late 2001

WHAT WE KNOW *Freelancer* is already on the "to watch" list after its impressive E3 showings. The persistent world version will ship after the single-player game and offer the opportunity to travel the game worlds, and trade and fight in an expanding *Freelancer* universe. More details on the online version will likely be released later this year.

MIDDLE EARTH

DEVELOPER Sierra
PUBLISHER Sierra
RELEASE DATE Late 2001

WHAT WE KNOW After internal restructuring, the *ME* project is apparently well underway (and we should have some news on its status next month). Aside from a complete change of development team, Sierra has also had to contend with legal issues over rights to the Tolkien franchise. Recently, it was rumored that EA was about to ink a deal for the rights to Lord of the Rings properties stemming from the movie currently nearing completion in New Zealand. Naturally, all parties will want to cash in on the level of interest surrounding the upcoming three movies; this is a big-name property that is probably one of the few with the clout to muscle room in the crowded fantasy online gaming market. Anyone who has ever been enthralled by the books would relish the opportunity to play in this setting — and that's a massive potential audience.



Using the *Battlecruiser Millennium* engine, GalComm Online promises to support up to a thousand players on one server.



Galactic Command Online

> ■ **DEVELOPER:** 3000 AD, Inc. ■ **PUBLISHER:** 3000 AD, Inc. ■ **WEBSITE:** www.3000ad.com ■ **RELEASE DATE:** Summer 2001 ■ **IT'S LIKE:** *Star Wars*, except by Derek Smart ■ **NOW MANY SIMULTANEOUS PLAYERS:** 1,000 per server—servers are crossable

Perhaps joining a new world is not enough for you. If so, you might find entering the GalCom universe more to your liking. Multitudes of planets teeming with inhabitants await your arrival, either for trade or for war, as you travel through the galaxy in your own Battlecruiser.

If combat is your language of choice, you'll enjoy conducting grand battles in space against aliens (or up to 1000 other



GalComm Online won't only be about space battles. It'll have RPG, RTS, and sim elements, too.

ships from the bridge, Kirk-and-Khan style. You'll be able to build military bases and hire commercial traders to stockpile the base with weapons and fighters, which you can then use to continue your war against other planets—in different star systems. It will all be powered by the *Battlecruiser Millennium*

Battlecruiser commanders per server), getting personal on the ground as a marine, piloting fighters whose dogfights go from empty space into the harsh atmospheres of nearby planets, or conducting combat between capitol

engine, sporting both T&L and DualHead support and enough detail that it should be able to handle everything from shooting weapons out of players hands in a first-person fight to conducting planet-to-planet conflicts.

Should you decide to speak a more financial lingo, you'll find that the 12 alien nations will offer you plenty of opportunities to cross-species pollinate your way to fiduciary success. You might decide to form a consortium to build an entire city from the ground up, or set up profitable interstellar trade routes with friends. And not just galred (the game currency) profitable, either. *GCO* will fully support and encourage a real-world economy and have a special server setup specifically for galreds and US Dollar currency exchange. So, if you wanted to buy an entire city that would cost about \$1000 real world dollars, you'd place your order and wait a couple of days for the new city to be built. Worried about losing your investment? Take out an insurance policy with monthly premiums (charged to the regular monthly subscription fee) or hire NPC-subscribed patrols.

GCO will have over 150 user-controllable space, ground and air units that can explore the ten galaxies that contain the 750 planets and over a thousand moons. Big enough for you? We can't wait to see if it all works.

YOU'LL BE SURE TO ENJOY:

More positions to engage in than the *Kame Sutra*. A sense of scale never before seen. Defending your starship from marine invasion, mano-a-mano!

BEWARE! The smell of over-ambition lingers from *BC2000AD*. Dickey real-world economic model.

The Greatest Show On Dirt™

The meanest, nastiest, wildest sprint cars anywhere get sideways on your PC for the first time ever.

Dirt Track Racing™: Sprint Cars puts you in the driver's seat with your choice of 16 World of Outlaws® stars. Drive one of their cars or design your own. Hit the dirt on 20 realistic speedways. Modify cars and tracks to make the action even meaner, wilder and nastier. Get ready for more excitement than you can handle!



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The Race
is on



"Think of *Sea Dogs* as *Pirates!* in 3D but with more depth to it... *Sea Dogs* simply looks great."

Gamers Central

"...combines the extremely addictive gameplay of both *Daggerfall* and the old Sid Meier classic, *Pirates!*"

FiringSquad



Sea Dogs is an epic role-playing game for the pirate in all of us. Return to the age of sail as a young captain looking to make a name in the world. Develop your character from humble beginnings and rise to control all of the islands for your country or yourself. You can give your allegiance to one of three countries or choose to serve only yourself as a swashbuckling pirate. Build your wealth and reputation and use it to acquire bigger ships and better crewman. Hire other captains to join you in attacking and capturing other ships or forts. Where you go and what you do is up to you.

The choices in *Sea Dogs* are endless...

And so is the fun.



Sea Dogs



Bethesda
SOFTWARES

Bethesda Softworks Inc.™ 1370 Piccard Drive, Suite 120, Rockville, MD 20850 Fax: 301.926.8300 www.bethsoft.com
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Player vs Player battles are the name of the game in Mythic's *Dark Age of Camelot*.

Mahrin

Bandit Lieutenant

Moupe

Ceastith

Pally

FuriousG

Dark Age of Camelot



< COVER STORY >

> **DEVELOPER:** Mythic Games **PUBLISHER:** TBA **WEBSITE:** www.mythicgames.com **RELEASE DATE:** Summer 2001
IT'S LIKE: *Excalibur* with a touch of CTF **HOW MANY SIMULTANEOUS PLAYERS:** 2000 to 3000

Largely based on the legends of King Arthur, players will enter into a fully 3D RPG world where PvP strife is the primary drive. Three realms will battle for control of ancient relics held in sacred shrines, each granting special powers to whichever realm possesses them. Realms are completely separate, so players will not be able to make characters in more than one realm per account, nor will they be able to communicate with other realms. You will just have to pick a side and stick with it.

Albion, the Arthurian realm of dark forests and stone castles, is all-human and offers a familiar mix of fighters, clerics, and mages. Midgard is the Nordic realm of icy peaks and tundra, where humans mingle with Dwarves, Trolls, and Kobolds and fight for the honor of the Norse gods. Hiberia is Celtic, populated by Elves and Lurikeen (think Leprechauns) who live in a magical world of rolling hills peppered with

mysterious temples and strange creatures. All of these races are playable, each having its own classes of warriors and mages with individually-themed skills.

New characters will start in the core cities far from the fringes of their respective realms, and fight their way towards enemy territory. En route they will meet friends, complete quests, and learn new skills in preparation for their inevitable battle with the other realms. This will create a border of high-level characters fighting to acquire and defend their shrines and ancient relics. Because every relic bestows bonuses to the entire realm, their defense is one of the primary activities of every player.



Here's a damsel. She's not in distress yet, but she probably will be soon.

ONLINE ORIGINS



Ah, the good old days of text-based adventuring. Who needs 3D acceleration? Er, us!

Multiplayer online games' origins go back more than a decade to online BBSs (Bulletin Board Systems), where players dialed-up in DOS, made selections for their character and checked in the next day to see the compiled results. Internet MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons) proliferate even now, with expansive text-based worlds to explore. Back then, it was the sense of community and personal investment that drew players. There were a few keepers, like AOL's *Neverwinter Nights* and *Gemstone III*, that served as true pioneers of online gaming. Honestly, can you imagine wrestling with COM ports in DOS just to get a turn-based game in EGA? Many people did, and even paid \$2.95 an hour (or more) for the privilege!

YOU'LL BE SURE TO ENJOY:

A quest journal that logs accepted quests. Meeting the Knights of the Round Table. The clear direction of every player.

BEWARE! Meeting "Sir Whackalot" might spoil the mood. Imbalances due to one realm getting most of the relics.

Want to make a killing... literally? *Project Entropia* is the first game that allows you to earn (or lose) real-world cash while playing



Project Entropia

> **DEVELOPER:** MindArk **PUBLISHER:** TBA **WEBSITE:** www.project-entropia.com **RELEASE DATE:** Summer 2001
IT'S LIKE: *EverQuest* merges with eBay **HOW MANY SIMULTANEOUS PLAYERS:** One million

As part of the massive colonization of the galaxy, robots were sent to planet Calypso in order to prepare it for incoming colonists. Sadly, shortly after the colonists arrived and started to set up shop, they were set upon by the robots and forced to fight for their lives in a war that almost destroyed them. Worse, after their victory, mutants started emerging from the radioactive wastelands and alien robots descended from space to eliminate everyone. Apparently, the life of a colonist is no picnic.

You join the game as one of the new generation of surviving colonists. Your challenge will be to make your mark on this struggling society. *Project Entropia* will have the same familiar quests, monsters, character development, and building construction we're used to in a 3D RPG, except with one major difference. This game's economy is based on real money. That's right, you will actually be able to spend your real-life money in the game, and cash out things from the game to your bank account. Quests will have actual cash rewards, and items will cost actual greenbacks.

Since the game itself will cost nothing to get or play, MindArk is hoping players will be willing to invest their time



Everyone will have a business proposition for you.



There's plenty of space for a million players here.

and money in an online virtual economy. For example, purchasing a plasma rifle for twenty dollars could earn you double that for hunting down a band of mutants, or a tidy profit for selling it in an area where plasma rifles are scarce. But if you lose it, not only is your rifle gone, but so is your twenty dollars. Online entrepreneurs hankering for some interstellar investing may enjoy the real-world risk of *Project Entropia*, but it's the shaky business model and current lack of a big-name publisher that concerns the rest of us.

YOU'LL BE SURE TO ENJOY:
 The low cost of entry—free!
 Potential financial rewards in the real world.

BEWARE! Losing your corpse is nothing compared to losing your money. Hackers will be all over this in two seconds.

**STUMPED?
TRY THESE!**

"PLEASE
PUT DOWN THE GUN!"

"PLEASE
PUT DOWN THE PILLS!"

"PLEASE
BACK OFF THE LEDGE!"

"PLEASE
DISCONNECT THE HOSE!"

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2. Listen	2. Listen
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4. Thank	4. Thank

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In *Anarchy Online*, you have the choice of joining an evil megacorporation or a clan opposing it. We'll take whichever side will allow us to do what she's doing.

Anarchy Online

> **DEVELOPER:** Funcom **PUBLISHER:** Funcom **WEBSITE:** www.anarchyonline.com
RELEASE DATE: Late 2000 **IT'S LINE:** *EverQuest* on Dune **HOW MANY SIMULTANEOUS PLAYERS:** Approx. 3000

The first thing you should know about *Anarchy Online*, a first-person 3D RPG set on the rich planet of Rubi-Ka, is that the element Notum is found in abundance. This element is critical to the creation of nanotechnology and is fantastically valuable to the rest of the known universe. The Omni-Tek megacorp has taken possession of Rubi-Ka, and through official regulation, is the sole distributor of Notum. As part of the regulation, the native population must develop without interference. This is the crux of the conflict, as Omni-Tek is straight evil and the native clans aren't happy; in fact, they've become violent. You will join either Omni-Tek or the clans in a struggle for control.

Omni-Tek is fabulously wealthy and as such can provide its employees with high-grade equipment, regular growth opportunities, medical benefits, and training. However, anyone joining its side will be forced to live under strong regulation — which may include following orders that can appear to be quite unsavory. There are seven departments you can join, covering everything from political administration to Notum mining, each offering its own flavor of adventure. Should you choose to be a member of the security agency Omni-Pol, for instance, you'll be sure to do a good deal of patrolling, suppressing clan attacks, and participating in any large battles Omni-Tek has in mind. Omni-InternOp agents would likely integrate themselves into

Character models are, in a word, unique.



But who would want to buy baboons?





Graphics effects during combat sequences look amazing. Not to mention very painful.

the clans, so they could report important information about their activities to Omni-Tek. Regardless of your career choice, it's important to remember that in the design of the game, Omni-Tek is evil. Not tragically misunderstood, but real, pure evil.

The clans are the exact opposite. Although they have little organization and sometimes fight amongst themselves, their focus is united against the intrusion of Omni-Tek on Rubi-Ka. Whether you join the Sentinels, who believe in violent action, or try and talk things out as a member of the more moderate New Dawn, every clan wants to stop Omni-Tek. Since they don't have massive resources available to them, clanspeople are forced to rely on themselves. Warriors can only train by engaging in battles, technicians will tinker with technology via craft skills in order to produce better weapons and equipment, and politicians will trade and negotiate deals between the various factions. Their freedom allows players to come and go as they please, training

in whichever skills they like, going to wherever they want, and even chartering their own clans. Character development might not be as fast, but it will be more open, and there is so much to learn in *Anarchy Online* that you'll never have a chance to get bored.

You will have six attributes and 40 skill options to develop, with additional specializations on top of that. This means that you could choose to be dexterous to begin with, know how to use rifles, and also specialize in the use of a particular model of rifle. Or, you could be physically tough, have a general resistance to poisons, and develop immunity to a particular type of poison. Four different genetically engineered races are available — your standard humans, muscled brutes (Homo Atrox), intellectuals (Homo Opifex), and the nanotechnology-attuned Homo Nano. For the fashion conscious, there will also be an incredibly wide variety of personal looks to choose from, including facial attributes, hairstyle, clothes, and other accessories.

If you join, you will find yourself part of the four-year story arc Funcom has planned for the game. That's four years of real-time where certain major events are already planned out and waiting for the players to react to. In the end, Funcom's goal is to arrive at a clear victory of one of the two sides over the

There will be a wide variety of personal looks available to customize your character.

THE PERILS OF MM

There is no doubt that massively multi-player online games are going to be a big part of gaming's future. But there's lots of doubt about the viability of all of these new titles.

With almost all of these games seeking some kind of monthly subscription fee, it becomes a simple matter of math that very few will be able to capture a large segment of the online gaming audience. There are simply too many games, and this is just the first wave of big releases.

More skepticism comes from the fact that it takes massive resources to operate these kinds of games, and many of the new publishers getting into this genre don't seem well-equipped for it. To provide a sobering example, *EverQuest* redirects an estimated 25 percent of all its revenues back into the cost of bandwidth for its servers. *Verant* coughed up between \$8-\$10 million to produce *EQ*; that's money that most publishers simply don't have.

Then there's the human factor: it takes a community of committed, serious players to make these games work, and we feel that there's currently a premium on those folks. *Game jorks* and "3133t 400dz," or Elite Dudes for those with a life, swarm all over online games like they have nothing better to do — oh wait, they don't. Games that focus on self-policing, where annoying players are quickly ejected or, better yet, imprisoned for their activities will be a welcome change.

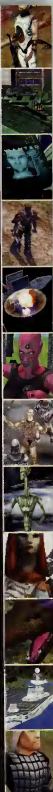
Other hurdles: marketing and branding will have a strong impact on the success of certain titles — and the failure of others. Many MMOG that's released within four months of *Star Wars Online* is going to get its head handed to it. Careful planning will be necessary. There's no doubt that a lot of these games simply won't make the cut.

other...four years from now. These major plot-driven events will spawn thousands of new quests that should keep players quite busy until the end.

The quest system is designed so that a player who is given a quest is also the only person who can complete it, so there won't be groups of people waiting to complete them. If you recruit other players to help with a quest, you'll also be able to distribute the XP gain. This opens up the possibility of mercenary guilds and top leaders being able to sit at home and dole out high XP missions to groups of characters under them.

YOU'LL BE SURE TO ENJOY: It should be out by Christmas. It's familiar gameplay, much like *EQ* and *AC*. Developers who pay attention to the players' needs.

BEWARE! Derivative gameplay may not be desirable. Do you have four years to commit to a game?



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Animated Violence

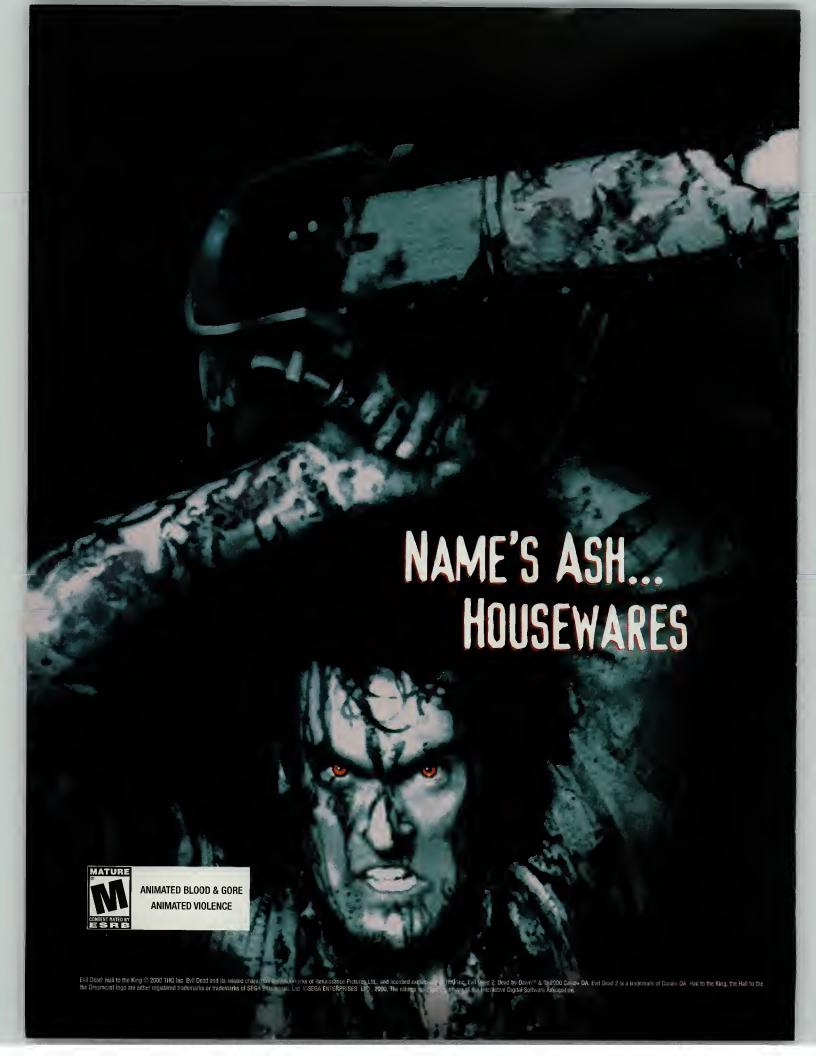
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EVIL DEAD

HAIL TO THE KING™

CHAINSAWS, BOOMSTICKS,
AND DEADITES, OH MY!

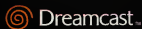
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Animated Violence

Zone

Microsoft



Atriarch

Build a home and eventually your very own empire in the grand 3D RPG *Atriarch*.

> ■ **DEVELOPER:** World Fusion ■ **PUBLISHER:** World Fusion ■ **WEBSITE:** www.atriarch.com
 ■ **RELEASE DATE:** Late 2001 ■ **IT'S LIKE:** Nothing you've ever seen ■ **HOW MANY SIMULTANEOUS PLAYERS:** At least 100,000

Many of the upcoming virtual worlds will allow you to find your own place in that world, but only the 3D RPG/strategy hybrid *Atriarch* offers you the opportunity to create your own. This is an alien game — an alien world with aliens populating it who have alien names and alien shapes. The only thing that's not alien is what you do in the game, which is, essentially, to live a normal life on the world of Atria.

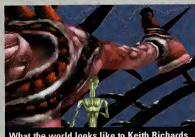
Born into the world as one of five species — Cavolon, Eshlar, Lokai, Tyrusni, or Unarra — you'll need to buy seeds and grow plants to serve as materials for building a house. After building said house, you will have the ability to decorate

it, build a fence around it, start a workshop inside of it, or start your own inn — if it's big enough. If you decide to leave, you can either lock it up or hire a Native (a character under the game's control) to look after it. For a fee, these Natives are quite capable of carrying out simple tasks like selling items for you or guarding your property. You can then move on to build the *Atriarch* equivalent of a blacksmith shop, or perhaps a sentry tower complete with Native guards keeping lookout. The choices are many, and completely up to you.

As you help to create the villages, towns, and cities of *Atriarch*, you'll also participate in personal growth goals, via quests. These quests are all based on direct and current events so that you will not just feel like a part of the world, but will be integral in shaping it. You might return from your mission of "killing the beast that's preying on travelers to the north" to find that the inn that you built has become quite popular and you've won a contest for "most popular gathering spot." Finally, your success in killing that beast might also cause new quests to spawn, like stopping a swarm of creatures (that used to be the beast's food source) from overrunning the town.

Because all of the activities in the world are based on either storyline elements, like the pursuit of tribal goals, the dominance of the ruling class (called Atriarchs), or economic fluctuations, *Atriarch* will keep you focused on current events

The settings are certainly original in style and design.



What the world looks like to Keith Richards.



Even the landscapes in *Aziarch* are alien.

instead of "leveling up." It's the interactions you'll have with the world that will guide your personal and social growth, regardless of whether your interests lie in combat or community.

In fact, there will be no definite statistics to look at in the game. Because there is no XP system, each character will develop their skills, be it Hunting, Mining, Weapon combat, Hand to Hand combat, Architecture, or Plant Breeding by actually using those skills in the world. Their level of skill will be noted by a title like Novice, Professional, Expert, or Master and these clear ranks will not only tell the player how talented they are, but also make them a marketable commodity to other players needing assistance.

The greatest level of accomplishment in the game is also the most compelling reason to play. When you manage to become sufficiently powerful, you can use your influence — be it financial or social — to develop your villages, towns, and cities into your own empire. As your cities grow, you'll need other players to administrate and manage them while you're offline. More players will be necessary to play trades people, soldiers, and builders. The end result is similar to the allegiance system in *Asheron's Call*, except that the powerful characters will own multiple cities complete with trade routes, regular social events, and armies ready to defend them. Now that's a worthy goal!

YOU'LL BE BORN TO ENJOY. Growing "bioluminescent" plants. The console fighting game style of combat. Total freedom in developing your character.

BE WARNED! Sorry, xenophobes — no human! Winning friends and influencing people is a must.

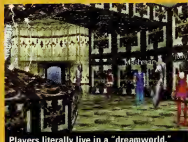
Now Playing

Aside from the "big three" of *Ultima Online*, *EverQuest*, and *Asheron's Call*, some other smaller online games are open for business. Check these out.

>>> UNDERLIGHT

DEVELOPER Lyra Studios PUBLISHER Lyra Studios PRICING \$3.95/month
www.underlight.com

Focusing almost entirely on role playing, *Underlight* is designed for players who want to engage in a persistent story with other people. The world, graphically similar to *EverQuest*, is set in a dreamscape, where everyone and everything is a part of "the dream." Players, as dreamers, help to maintain and develop the city of *Underlight*, while fighting off the incursions of the nightmares that come from the chaos surrounding the city. Through training under powerful players and fighting nightmares, you develop strength in controlling the dreamworld. However, all is not harmonious in *Underlight*. The four Houses of Thought each hold their own vision of how the city should grow, and your choice of which house to join will prove crucial to both your health and the health of the dream city.

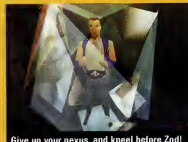


Players literally live in a "dreamworld."

>>> SPELLBINDER: THE NEXUS CONFLICT

DEVELOPER Mythic Games PUBLISHER Mothership Games PRICING \$3.95/month
www.mothership.com/games/spellbinder/index.html

If *Quake* CTF were a magical RPG, it would be called *Spellbinder*. You choose from four classes — the damaging Magician, the team-friendly Healer, the sneaky Mystic, and the trap-laying RuneMage — and enter an arena where teams of mages fight over magical nexuses, the source of their magic. Although there is a great deal of running around and strafing while casting spells, the game escapes from being just another FPS by allowing you to build up persistent characters — so the longer and better you play, the more powerful your character will become due to the increasingly powerful spells you can access.



Give up your nexus, and kneel before Zodi!

>>> CLAN LORD

DEVELOPER Delta Tao Software PUBLISHER Delta Tao Software PRICING \$3.95/month
www.clanlord.com

Mac users, how about a little something for you! You'll find plenty of adventure around the town of Puddleby, in this top-down 2D RPG where beer and pretzels fun has gone deeply digital. Starting with a very simple character design stemming from the seven playable races, players are dropped into a lively and social fantasy world, complete with fire-breathing dragons to slay, teams of skeletons to return to their graves, and kegs of beer to slug down after a hard day's adventure. *Clan Lord* has an easy interface and a well-developed community that should make your entry into the world a snap. Once you're in, you'll find it deceptively deep, as you join clans, guilds, and orders, train your skills under powerful Masters, quest with scores of friends, and perhaps discover what it is to be one of the arcane mystics.



It's crowded in the 2D land of *Clan Lord*.

< COVER STORY >

EverQuest's Verant leaves dungeon-crawling behind for real-time strategy in their upcoming game, *Sovereign*. Who wouldn't want to play head-to-head against 499 of your closest friends?



Sovereign

> **DEVELOPER:** Verant **PUBLISHER:** SOE **WEBSITE:** www.verant.com **RELEASE DATE:** Late 2001
IT'S LIKE: *Command and Conquer X 500* **HOW MANY SIMULTANEOUS PLAYERS:** Up to 500

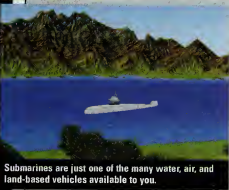
Ruling the world is never quite as fun when all you're ruling is AI scripts. With *Sovereign*, you'll be wheeling and death dealing with and against hundreds of other players for control of a completely 3D world, using diplomacy and destruction as your primary tools. RTS fans will already be intimate with the basics here — gather resources (based on your cities' locations), build your war engine of factories, tanks, planes, and ships, and go conquer the world.

At the start of a game, each player gains control of an available city and begins the outward expansion of their empire. You can choose how to develop your "character" by focusing on particular elements of the tech tree, such as surveillance, construction, or weapons that will allow you to perform tasks or manufacture items others cannot. These games may go on from weeks to months, with the computer AI taking over command of your empire when you're offline.

The alliances you form will be critical to your success and survival, due to the large number of potential enemies and the limited amount of time available. You will want to have your allies protect your empire and manage its resources while you're away, and coordinate attacks with you when you're online. Alliances will be limited in size, so the quality of your allies is very important and you won't be able to ally with everyone just to win a game. Allies that backstab will have persistent stats that will follow them, letting other players know about their scheming nature and making it harder for their betrayals to succeed in the future.

Depending on how the game is set up at its creation, you'll have a limit on the number of moves and attacks you can make per 24-hour period, much like old BBS wargames. This feature should limit power gamers who might be able to spend far more time online than the majority of players from overwhelming your forces. Should you be attacked while you're living a regular life, you can choose to have the game contact you through ICQ, pager, or E-mail in the real world. After the game is finished (win or lose), the degree of experience you gained from that encounter is recorded and will determine the available technology and skills for your empire in the following games.

Submarines are just one of the many water, air, and land-based vehicles available to you.



YOU'LL BE SHIP TO SHIP: Satellites, which will allow you to see the whole planet. Formations, granting tactical advantages. Economic victory conditions.

BEWARE! 500 players with no lag? In an RTS! A fully 3D online RTS is likely to demand steep hardware requirements.


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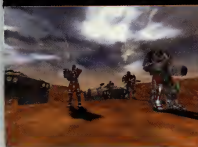
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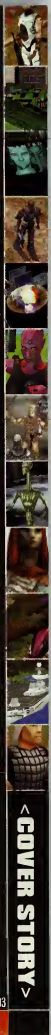
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Motor City Online

The glossy visuals perfectly capture the atmosphere of a 1950's drag race. We can almost hear the theme to "Greased Lightning" now...

> **DEVELOPER:** EA ■ **PUBLISHER:** EA ■ **WEBSITE:** www.ea.com ■ **RELEASE DATE:** TBA
 ■ **IT'S LIKE:** *Need For Speed* meets *AMA Superbike* ■ **NOW MANY SIMULTANEOUS PLAYERS:** TBA

Gearheads get ready — *Motor City Online* is about to bring you all the classic car racing, car modifications, and high-speed street racing you can handle. And you won't be alone. You'll cruise the neighborhoods of Motor City showing off your fancy ride in search of opportunities to race against other aspiring wheelmen. If you're good enough, you'll get invited to compete in special racing events with huge purses at stake — and you'll

need all the money possible to trick out your ride in preparation for more rubber-burning action.

Starting in your garage with a basic heap to work on, you can repair or modify your car with thousands of parts, including everything from shocks, carburetors,

and fuel injection systems to the engine, bumpers, and paint job. These parts are traded through Motor City Online's dynamic economic system that will track which parts exist and how valuable they are depending on their quality and availability. Each part will have an effect on the performance of your ride, and each engine modification will change the sound of the mechanics under your hood, allowing you to appreciate fully the purr of your high-performance chariot. Car models will feature a whopping 6,500 polygons, sporting such details as transparent windows, visible interiors, convertible roofs, hoods that open, and full polygonal wheels.

The multiplayer design sets up races at diners and cafes, where players will meet before races and be able to check out each other's vehicles and insurance ratings. Insurance ratings? Well, you don't want to race against a spoiler who spends his time smashing his junker into other people's sweet rides, so each driver will have a rating that indicates how many "accidents" they have been in. So long as they check out, you'll meet up, match up, and get ready to redline with some hardcore classic racing.



Between races you'll have the opportunity to meet other players in the local diner.

PLAYER PRIVATEERS PRODUCE PROFITS?

Time is money, and in the MMORPG world that has certainly been proved true. A quick check on eBay will offer up astounding quantities of virtual product for prices averaging in the hundreds of dollars. As we checked, just before press time, *EverQuest* had with 3,700 items; *Ultima Online* was second with 1,400; *Asheron's Call* with 67; — and (brace yourself) even *Remstone III* has 28! It's pretty clear that although the per-hour profits are pretty slim, one can certainly turn a buck simply by playing a game!

YOU'LL BE SURE TO ENJOY: The incredible graphics of both the cars and the tracks. Admiring the detail and performance of your own car. An easy interface, allowing quick races.

BEWARE! Real-time online racing may be hindered by modem connections. Internal development issues.

< COVER STORY >

No need to be illiterate in this computer game that lets you try to lead a host to do up the magnificent medieval Siege Machine.



Shadowbane

> **DEVELOPER:** Wolfpack Studios **PUBLISHER:** g.o.d. **WEBSITE:** www.shadowbane.com **RELEASE DATE:** 2001
IT'S LIKE: The grim reality of actual Medieval Europe doused in D&D **NOW MANY SIMULTANEOUS PLAYERS:** Thousands

Shadowbane's focus is clear. The entire game is centered on large scale third-person 3D Player-vs-Player conflict, so you won't be seeing bread-baking or weaving skills, nor will you find many safe zones. Your character's development will be geared towards mastering combat skills and spells for your performance in the large scale battles to come.

As your character develops, you'll be able to join or lead various factions in their struggles. This will start as simple group questing, but will expand to include land disputes and full-fledged sieges of walled cities. These battles could possibly go on for days of real-time.



Armor varies from player to player.

I shall taunt you a second time!



To prevent skirmishes from degrading into massive wars, players who develop "tactical command" skills will be able to set formations and enter combat with a much more strategic plan than the typical horde-attack. This

should promote the gravitation of weaker players to more powerful characters, who will be able to protect them from the generous quantities of death waiting in this game.

When you kill another player, you will always get less XP than that player lost, and the amounts will largely be determined by the difference in level between the two combatants. This should promote challenging battles, as well as dissuade "mule-killing" exploits (where a character kills another character who's only there to be slaughtered). You'll still spend a good deal of your time completing quests, slaying monsters, and going on dungeon dives to improve your character.

Because you'll die often, you'll be able to "bind" objects so that when you respawn, certain items will be guaranteed to still be on your body. The penalties of death will include the loss of experience and items, but this will be balanced based on your experience level, so newbies won't lose very much at all while powerful players risk significant losses.

Shadowbane will also be composed of linked servers, each with a different theme and rules, so you might travel to a different world only to discover that the "fireball" spell you developed on the feudal world does not pack as much punch from the magic system in the Ice world. This should keep things lively for a long time, since Wolfpack can add all-new worlds for players to migrate to.

YOU'LL BE SOME TO ENJOY. Constantly going toe-to-toe with humans, not AIs. A clear focus on medieval war.

BEWARE! Endless worlds of PKers? Fighting in mass battles may conflict with real life schedules.

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<http://www.esrb.org>

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Occamus



Published by

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Other Worlds to Explore

ULTIMA WORLDS ONLINE: ORIGIN

DEVELOPER Origin PUBLISHER EA RELEASE DATE By Christmas 2001
WEBSITE www.uwo2.com



Origin will likely be the first of the next generation of MMORPGs.

Besides a name change from *Ultima Online 2 to UWO: Origin* and the release date shifting from Spring to Christmas 2001, there are no major changes to report in the development of *Origin* since our June cover story. Not a sequel to *Ultima Online* (which will continue to run even after *Origin's* release), *UWO: Origin* is a

fully 3D first-person perspective persistent RPG that takes place on the world of Sosaria, not the land of Britannia. And when we say "world," that's not just a euphemism: Sosaria has an orbit and rotation, resulting in a sun that smoothly moves across the sky, and even has moon phases.

Origin's producer, Starr Long, says that the focus of the game is on "intense warfare, cool worlds, accessibility, and customizability. The game is looking better and better every day." "In-house pre-alpha testing should be ongoing as you read this, with a public beta test beginning in the spring of 2001. Says Long: "We're really committed to listening to you and getting feedback from our fans. Keep checking our website, because I hope as many people sign up for beta-testing as possible."

NEOCRON

DEVELOPER Reaktor Media PUBLISHER TBD RELEASE DATE Q2 2001
WEBSITE www.neocron.com



The cyberpunk setting has always proved popular with table-top gamers.

If you're looking for something in size "cyberpunk," this first-person shooter should fit you just fine. Combining a post-apocalyptic future with high-tech implants and sprawling cities, you'll choose from four starting classes — Private Eye, Spy, Tank, and Psi monk — and make your mark on society through the use of your spe-

cialized skills. Your primary attributes will increase only through practice, so if you're looking to increase your dexterity, you'll have to train with medical technology, vehicle driving, and high-tech hardware.

Killing rats won't get you far if you're looking to be a warrior — you'll find yourself using a wide variety of weapons and armor and engaging in both hand-to-hand and ranged combat. These skills will come in handy when you meet up with mutants, warbots, and genetically engineered Dobermans in the abandoned industrial sectors of Earth — the Outzones. And in case you get tired of the city life, there's always the off-world colony, Irata 3, which just discovered alien life shortly before we lost all contact with them. Mystery and mayhem await!

WORLD WAR II ONLINE

DEVELOPER Coroner Rat Software PUBLISHER Playnet, Inc.
RELEASE DATE Early 2001 WEBSITE www.wwoonline.com



Recreating scenes from classic war movies against real people...fantastic.

Are you ready to grab your rifle, jump in a tank and take out that Nazi pillbox, or strap yourself into a Stuka Ju-87? *WWII Online* will be the first realized first-person 3D online battlefield, and it's going to need you!

Choose your country — Germany, France, Great Britain, The Commonwealth (Australia, New Zealand, Canada, etc.), Italy, Japan, USA, China, and Russia — and a branch of service (air, naval, etc.), and join one of the available missions posted by higher ranking players. Each completed mission gives players a rank points bonus, which are then compiled and "turned in" for the next higher rank. Each level grants new abilities, like new vehicles or tools that will affect your entire country's resources — so you might start out just firing a gun on a battleship, but end up directing the entire fleet.

As the war progresses, technology packs will be released. So the 1941 set of planes, tanks, ships, and troop weapons will "retire" the 1940 set. These sets will be released all the way into 1945, and maybe even '46. Will it be over before the Nazis get [et fighters]?

HORIZONS: EMPIRES OF ISTARIA

DEVELOPER Artifact Entertainment PUBLISHER TBD
RELEASE DATE 2002 WEBSITE www.artifact-entertainment.com



The static screenshots look great, but gameplay is a big question mark.

A maelstrom of traditional fantasy elements will surround players in this first-person perspective RPG. Dragons and Elves are joined by Demons and Vampires, Dryads and Giants amongst eight other playable races, each with its own spell selection and special skills.

There will be a deep deity system wherein players

who choose to follow particular gods will be granted special bonuses in return for their piety, but will face serious penalties should they not contribute tithes or follow the canons of their religion. Extensive trade skill sets will encourage players to engage each other — weapons, buildings, clothing, food, alchemical potions, and even gadgets like watches and telescopes can be manufactured and sold. Although the lands will be quite large, transportation will be provided by mounts as simple as mules to fantastic griffons, though the more exotic steeds will require special items to ride them (found through quests, of course).

Horizons managed to secure funding to pursue development but there's still no guarantee that it will ever see public release.

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the leading game charts."
Gamer's Pulse, August 2000

"This is definitely not a
'me too' game:
it has the potential
to be one of the
compelling strategy
titles of the year."
PC Gamer, August 2000

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Other Worlds to Explore

STARPEACE

DEVELOPER Dceanus PUBLISHER Monto Cristo RELEASE DATE 11/15/2000
 WEBSITE www.montocristogames.com



Has the thunder for a *SimCity* online game been stolen?

Taking the *SimCity* concept and moving online, *Starpeace* allows intrepid investors to participate in the colonization of new worlds. Players will control start-up companies and manage their growth in burgeoning cities, interacting with both the populace and with other player-controlled companies.

Building mines, refineries, and factories will be just as necessary as setting up distribution and retail channels, without ever forgetting the importance of your standing with the consumers and your business relationships. Each element of your business empire can be micro-managed, so you can focus on the day-to-day activities of a single store, change your employees' base salaries, or attempt to squeeze a few extra bucks out of a factory by lowering the grade of the raw materials it uses. As you become more powerful, you'll be able to finance your own cities, giving them a name, and becoming de facto mayor — so you'll be the primary influence on incoming companies. Future plans for the game include alien invasions, interplanetary trade, and outright military war between corporate lords.

WARHAMMER ONLINE

DEVELOPER Climax PUBLISHER Games Workshop RELEASE DATE 2002
 WEBSITE www.games-workshop.com



Climax will bring the table-top miniatures game into a new online format.

The most popular tabletop game ever created finally joins us in the 21st century. Although Games Workshop's turn-based wargame will be presented in real-time, the powerful 3D engine and multiple armies engaging simultaneously with all the expected individual unit details should keep traditional fans happy while

attending to the short attention spans of newcomers. Players will be able to "paint" each of the hundreds of units with their own schemes, and design sizeable battlegrounds to engage on. Because the engine will scale the detail level as needed, you'll be able to watch the mayhem of battle in its entirety or zoom into a single unit to admire its individual details. It's not clear yet how the purchase or trade of units, a primary focus of tabletop players and the meat-and-potatoes of Games Workshop's business, will be handled, but it's likely that online players will enjoy a commerce structure similar to the original game where sets of units are bought to supplement the design of one's army. In addition, the promised input of Microsoft should help overcome technical issues.

ARCANITY

DEVELOPER Brick House Trading Co. PUBLISHER TBD RELEASE DATE TBD
 WEBSITE www.brickhoustrading.com/game.html



Rule 1 of online game development: create a cool looking castle!

It's just begun development, but *Arcanity* is taking the standard fantasy world and wrapping it around a karmic system that should prove a breath of fresh air to players who are interested in role-playing without the arbitrary boundaries of rules-based social interaction.

Characters will have an alignment status (similar to D&D) that will be altered by their actions in the game. The twist is that other players will be the controlling factor. You'll be able to "report" a player as being evil, and your report will result in their alignment actually becoming more evil. To avoid players who might abuse this by reporting constantly, the less frequently one reports someone, the more powerful the report is. One of the results of this system will be an internal development of morality — if the majority of people think PKing is good, votes will quickly make the minority into "evil" characters. Evil characters could face penalties from imprisonment to death, by city guards or bounty hunter contracts. These original ideas may allow *Arcanity* to carve out its own place in the crowded online world.

HERO'S JOURNEY

DEVELOPER Simutronics Corp. PUBLISHER Simutronics Corp.
 RELEASE DATE TBD WEBSITE www.play.net/simnet_public/hero/



A round-up of online games wouldn't be complete without Simutronics.

Most MMORPGs are designed and created by a small number of core people, but the folks over at Simutronics, the only true veterans in this field, and the makers of the classic *GenStone III*, feel that large scale games should be made by large scale teams. Utilizing a large staff of world designers, they hope

to load their 3D isometric environment with diversity in areas where previous games have proved more uniform. They are working to make terrain more than just flatlands punctuated with trees or small hills, have characters who can express their moods through physical animation, and quest structures that involve human game masters designing goals that are not only more than "FedEx" missions but also evolve into greater quests. They want combat to be less "stand there and hack" and more dynamic — showing a poor fighter making clumsy attacks whereas an expert would pull off some Jackie Chan moves. They've got the experience and from the screenshots it looks like they'll have the graphics, but the question remains, will they have you?

PCG

Includes a **FREE**
Limited Edition
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headset



DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE DARK TRIBE!

YOUR ENEMIES MIGHT BE YOUR ONLY ALLIES...

"The latest edition
of the game
innovates in some ways
but really 'goes back
to its roots' in others."

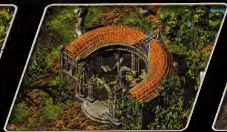
PCIGN.com

"The Settlers IV is
on track to be the
best Settlers game
yet with all of the
new features that
have been added."

GameNews.com

THE SETTLERS

Featuring the New Dark Tribe



Just when you mastered the art of war...
The gods changed the rules.
Download the demo and
free *Smack-A-Thief!* mini-game at

bluebyte.net



www.bluebyte.net

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PREPARE YOURSELF FOR A LITTLE INTERGALACTIC SHOWDOWN.



CUSTOMIZE YOUR ARSENAL

Mix and match to create up to 32 variations of powerful weaponry, including upgrades.



FOUR UNIQUE WORLDS

Stalk your quarry from 3-D dinosaur-infested jungle ruins to corroded techno-wastelands.



FIERCE PREDATORS

Hunt down hordes of genetically modified mutants in single- and multiplayer action.

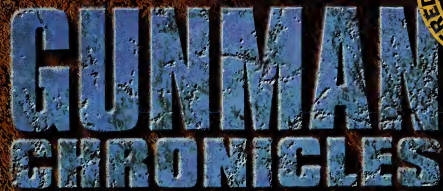


Visit www.esrb.org
or call 1-800-771-3372
for more info.

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STUDIOS



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darkconspiracy.sierra.com
www.groundcontrol1.com

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STUDIOS

DANGER
HIGH
VOLTAGE
SOFTWARE



massive
entertainment

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pack for ground control

"It is so life like and seamless
that simply being in the game
is its own reward." -THE NEW YORK TIMES

Building on the award winning technology, gameplay and action from Ground Control, Dark Conspiracy continues the story of Major Sarah Parker. After defeating the Crayven Corporation and Order of the New Dawn forces on Krig-7b, Sarah Parker must enlist a group of mercenaries to help her escape from the deserted planet. Playing as Major Parker, you must command your way through 15 missions on 3 planets to uncover a dangerous new religious faction and discover the terrifying truth about an alien technology they aim to possess.



GROUND CONTROL DARK CONSPIRACY

Requires Ground Control to Play

H A L F

C O U N T E R

The #1 Online



Real weapons mean real damage in this tactical action thriller



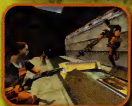
Win more rounds – your team earns more "money" to buy bigger and better weapons.



Complete strategic objectives with your team – your every action impacts your teammates.

Plus The Ultimate Collection of Half-Life Multiplayer Games:

- ❖ Half-Life Multiplayer
- ❖ Opposing Force™ Multiplayer
- ❖ Team Fortress Classic™
- ❖ Wanted
- ❖ Redemption
- ❖ Firearms



- L I F E - - S T R I K E -

Multiplayer Game

Arm yourself with real-world weapons from Sig Sauers to C4. Complete diverse and challenging strategic missions in several real-world locations. Demolish enemy sites, rescue hostages, or just wipe up the floor with the opposition in this wildly popular team-based game based on the award-winning Half-Life engine.

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for more info.

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PC Gamer's Holiday Gift Guide

BEHIND BARS

A holiday fable in which the PC Gamer staff learns a valuable lesson about life, the long arm of the law, and a stash of new gifts for the entire family.





'Twas the night before deadline
upon the holiday season
And the staff played Firearms,
not listening to reason
"Oh, no! We've no gifts!
Whatever shall we do?"
They had very few dollars,
not even quite two.

Said Dan: "If you'd like to sneak out
and score a major haul,
You'll have to be a goon
and rob the nearest mall!"
Normally the boys behaved
in ways almost lawful
But the circumstances at hand
left them feeling rather awful.

PLAY WITH US

THIS AIN'T YOUR DADDY'S PC LINE



Who said a quality PC controller had to cost one million dollars and look like the next guy's?

For instance, InterAct's Hammerhead FX

is a professional quality PC controller with a fresh look, countless features and a price that won't have you living on ramen noodles and mayonnaise-bacon-bit sandwiches.

Additional members of InterAct's PC family:

AxisPad

For the PC gamer who wants just a little more.



GoPad

The perfect controller for gaming on your laptop.



ProPad Advanced
So much more than your average PC controller.



SETH GREEN

To see the complete line of InterAct's PC products, go to www.interact-acc.com

Go to www.pcgamer.com/request Product #353



"Up Greg! Up Dan! You, too, Chuck and Lt!
To the mall to grab gifts for gratis (That's free!)
So they loaded up the Nissan for an illicit booty run
Each hoping against hope they would ride "shotgun"



The Goodies

**Creative
Nomad Jukebox**
\$499
www.nomadworld.com

**Letter to the judge
Mitigating
Circumstances**

Your honor,

We deeply regret stealing this Creative Nomad Jukebox; however, we believe you'll agree that we can't be held responsible for our actions. It is, by far, the greatest product we've had the honor of laying the of five-fingered discount on. Ripping MP3 files from CDs and transferring them to the Jukebox is a breeze, and even after loading up every song in our collection, we still had a couple of gigs left to be filled. Connecting to your PC via USB port, the Jukebox can copy a complete song over in about 10 seconds. The included Creative Playercenter 2 software automatically downloads artist and track info from the web, and the Jukebox stores those details, even categorizing music by genre, artist, or album. Sure, not everything's rosy...the volume isn't quite as loud as a standard portable CD player and we had a few problems with the rechargeable batteries, but make no mistake about it — the Nomad Jukebox is the future of personal music.

Sincerely,
PC Gomer



The big daddy of MP3 players, the Jukebox holds 6GB of music, speech, or anything else playable in a MP3 or WAV file format. (That's about 150 CDs, or more than 100 hours of tunes.) About the size of a portable CD player (5" x 5" x 1.5") and weighing less than a pound, the Jukebox is small enough to carry your entire music collection anywhere you go. Not only that, but the internal firmware can be upgraded, allowing potential support for any future digital audio format.

Once they arrived at their stealing destination
The boys learned thievery took much dedication.
Alert for mall security, they could see none
So off to their first victim...and, boy, did they run!



Diamond
Rio 600
\$169.95
www.riohome.com

If you're a jogger, or the Nomad Jukebox is too bulky or expensive for your needs, the Rio 600 is the perfect solution for listening to digital music on the go. Packing 32MB of memory, it'll hold about one hour of music or 16 hours of speech. If that's not enough time, one, two, and ten-hour snap-on memory packs are available. You can even buy additional faceplates in case you'd like to customize your Rio's look.



EverQuest
Action Figures
\$9.99-11.99
www.toyvault.com

Going offline doesn't mean you have to stop playing with your favorite characters from EverQuest. Beg your very own pint-sized 7" Troll Shaman for a hind or gaze lovingly at the curvaceous Dark Elf Wizard with seven points of articulation. Each comes with accessories right out of the game; for example, the Spillpaw Gnome comes with a stone spider, giant snake, and a Shield of Slain Unicorn and the Troll Warrior is equipped with a leather tunic, Shortsword of the Ykeshe, a spiderling, and, of course, a rat. The suspects claim they grabbed these for Editor-in-Chief (and rabid fan) Rob Smith, however it's doubtful any of them will "level up" for their fool deed.



Blackburrow
Gnome



Dark Elf
Wizard



Iksar
Necromancer



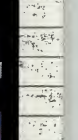
Iksar
Warrior



Spillpaw
Gnome



Troll
Shaman



Troll
Warrior

MS Sidewinder
Strategic Commander
\$64.95
www.microsoft.com

Ever wonder why playing strategy or roleplaying games with a keyboard and mouse has to be so damned difficult? Leave it to Microsoft to make a new peripheral that's a must-have for Diablo II and AOE II fanatics alike. The one-handed control allows you to move units or scroll while giving commands via the easy-to-reach shortcut buttons placed right on the pad. The Strategic Commander can be programmed for up to 72 commands, and comes with 30 pre-programmed profiles for your favorite games with more available for download.



Ace pilots don't settle for cheap thrills.

Real flying is all about wrestling the raw powers of Mother Nature. Hanging on as you throttle your engines. And relishing the feeling as your wheels kiss the tarmac. You've never felt anything like the new SideWinder[®] Force Feedback 2 joystick. Using a next-generation processor, it takes technology to the limit by delivering over 100 distinct forces with more speed and strength than ever before. Turning more than 200 force feedback-enabled games into the most intense gaming experience imaginable. So the next time you're ready to push the envelope, you'd better buckle in first.



MICROSOFT
SIDEWINDER
FORCE FEEDBACK 2

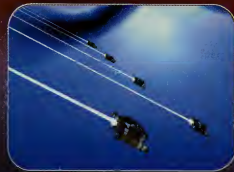
www.microsoft.com/sidewinder

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EVERYONE
E
ESRB

Animated Violence



SIERRA
STUDIOS



BARKING
DOG
STUDIOS

relic
ENTERTAINMENT



See Cataclysm box
for a special offer on
FINAL DESTINATION
available on DVD \$128

...from the cryo-trays. We had survived the journey to Hiigara, our lost homeworld. Then they told us that the planet we left behind had been destroyed. Our families... friends... everyone not on the mothership — killed. Destroyed by an enemy we never knew.

We realized there was nothing for us on Hiigara. No property, no rights, no future for the "Sleepers." So we returned to the stars, fully awake this time, to work and rebuild our lives.

It is ironic, then, that we are the ones to discover an alien capable of exterminating all life in the galaxy. And only we are in a position to destroy it.



"A true follow-up, it's a textbook example of what real-time strategy should be all about and therefore we cannot help but love it"



HOMEWORLD CATAclysm

Available Now

www.homeworld.net



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"Given a choice between pants or maybe striped socks, I think I'll seize a Creative Nomad Jukebox!"
 "Not me!" said Greg, on the lookout for a cop,
 "I'm going to snatch me a Dell Inspiron laptop."



By suspect Greg Vederman's own admission, the GLADIAC is one of the most powerful new 3D cards on the market. In fact, he freely admits to giving it PC Gamer's Editors' Choice award in the August 2000 issue. Based on the GeForce2 GTS design, the GLADIAC comes in both 32MB and 64MB DDR RAM varieties. The only reason not to get one is if you've decided to wait for the upcoming GLADIAC Ultra (a faster card with 64MB RAM), which may be out by the time you read this.



ELISA
GLADIAC
\$329
www.elisa.com

**Diamond
 Mako**
\$399

www.diamondmako.com

Letter to the judge
**Mitigating
 Circumstances**

Your honor,

Even an officer of the court would be hard-pressed not to want one of these babies. We really liked the fact that the Mako comes with a keyboard, though you might have to scrunch your fingers together to get any typing done. Its fold-up design helps protect the screen from scratches or fingerprints when not in use, and its extra-wide screen matches standard web layouts. The downsides? Well, Symbian EPOC OS hasn't caught on in the U.S. as much as Palm OS or Windows CE, and we wish the docking station unit were an easier fit. Bottery length is only 12 hours — about the same as a Compaq IPAQ — but much less than the Palm Vx's 21 days. At a mere 7oz., though, it's like carrying around a mini-laptop.

In closing, we're very sorry and won't ever do it again.

Sincerely,
 PC Gamer



Slightly longer and thinner when folded than most PDAs, the Diamond Mako has one other major difference: a slim 53 key QWERTY keyboard. The Mako is powered by the Symbian EPOC operating system, comes with 16MB of internal RAM, and features a 480x160-pixel mono touch-screen display. It comes with word processor, spreadsheet, E-mail, organizer, and web browser

programs, all compatible with your full-sized home PC. Only one puzzle game comes with the Mako, but more can be downloaded from the web. A travel modem is available separately.

**Logitech Wingman
 RumblePad**
\$29.95
www.logitech.com

Another PC Gamer Editors' Choice winner (November 2000), the Wingman RumblePad is a solid, all-around game pad that just happens to support force feedback vibration. It comes with a standard eight-way D-pad and six primary buttons on its face along with two flipper buttons on top. Two thumb-controlled analog joysticks round out the package. And if you're not too keen about your gamepad moving around more than you do, the rumble effect can be turned off. (We believe the suspects left trace amounts of saliva from excessive drooling on this unit. Better keep for DNA evidence.)



But as the gang fondled an EverQuest dolly,
They didn't know their plan would soon turn to folly.
For the mall police aren't at all stupid, you see.
They saw the boys coming, on Security Cam Three.



**Dell Inspiron
4000 Laptop**
\$1,799 and up
www.dell.com



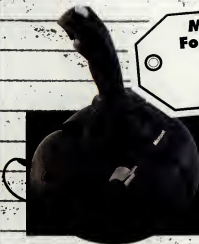
This is a compact, yet powerful, lightweight laptop powered by a high-speed PIII processor (600MHz — 850 MHz speeds are available). It includes an SMB ATI Rage Mobility 128 video card for all your gaming needs, and a 14.1" XGA color display. Configured to support 6, 10, or 20GB hard drives, the Dell 4000 weighs only 5.87 lbs with the battery and is a sleek 1.47" thin. The fashion-conscious can buy colorful optional faceplates separately. (See full review on p. 188) Note: Item had to be pried from the suspects' arms.

**Creative
SoundBlaster Live!**
Platinum 5.1
\$199.99
www.soundblaster.com

The popular SoundBlaster audio series gets upgraded once again, this time with support for crystal-clear Dolby 5.1 surround sound. The Platinum edition comes with a huge software bundle, including full versions of the hit games *Unreal Tournament*, *MDK2*, *Thief 2*, and *Deus Ex* along with a host of music programs and utilities. The Live!Drive allows you to connect simultaneous digital and analog audio devices through the front of your PC, and includes a wireless remote control for easy navigation. The game bundle alone is well worth the retail price.



**MS Sidewinder
Force Feedback 2
Joystick**
\$109
www.microsoft.com



Smaller than the original, the SideWinder Force Feedback 2 joystick is an overhaul of the old design. It sports an eight-way hat, twistable rudder, a push throttle, eight programmable buttons, and an on-board power supply. Its 16-bit 25MHz processor supports realistic force feedback in more than 200 current games, and its comfortable, ergonomic design is well-suited to any game that uses a joystick. The Force Feedback 2 ships with pre-set profiles for 20 games. (See page 190 for a full review).



Lucky Larry

Frank E. Laddie
death by sniper rifle



2quick1C

W. Jack Carter
death by rocket launcher



King of Pain

P. Ryan Sillars
death by Smart Gun

Who's keeping score?

Chalk up another victory and hang your fallen enemy on the wall. Introducing Global Rankings™ – your tool for tracking all your game scores, statistics, and world rankings. With FREE real-time automatic reporting you can easily check the results when you're done playing your favorite games. Find out who has the most kills with the rocket launcher or who's always camping out. User-managed leagues let you compete against your friends or take on a rival clan. Isn't it time you take your game to the next level?

You kick ass, we'll take the names.

www.globalrankings.com

Look for Global Rankings in these killer games:



COMMANDOS 2



No One Lives Forever



**ALIEN PREDATOR
GOLD EDITION**

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**GLOBAL
RANKINGS™**

Up stairs and through aisles, they led a merry chase.
 Chuck huffed and puffed heavily; you should've seen his face
 But all were captured quickly, except for the one they call Dan
 Who told all that would listen he'd never be taken by "The Man".



Those PC Gamer Editors' Choice award winners (this time from October 2000) proved very popular with the light-fingers. The Game Commander offers a whole new way to play your games — by talking to them. What's more, it actually works. Just use the software's preset voice commands — or make your own — to change weapons, call for help, bring up your inventory or anything else you'd normally do with a keyboard. Comes with a microphone, or you can even use your own.

Mindmaker Game
 Commander

\$29.99

www.gamecommander.com

Saitek X36 Flight
 Control and
 Throttle System

\$99.95

www.saitek.com

You guessed it: another PC Gamer Editors' Choice recipient (June 2000). Our robbery suspects are definitely consistent in their tastes. This combo for flight sim fanatics includes a joystick and throttle that look like they've been ripped right out of a real-life cockpit, and can be connected to your PC via USB or gameport. Not for casual gamers, the X36 is sturdy and configurable enough to make any hardcore "Top Gun" very happy indeed.

func Industries
 sUrface 1030

\$19.95

www.func.com

Now this one puzzles us the most. Why would anyone go to the trouble of stealing a mouse pad? It must be because the sUrface 1030 is quite honestly the best mouse surface PC Gamer has ever laid their nice on, earning a PC Gamer Editors' Choice award (August 2000). The surface itself is double-sided; one with a smooth, fine-grained texture and the other much coarser. Either side can be used depending on your taste and precision of movement. Another nice feature is the mouse cord clip that keeps your mouse cord in check. Hmm...this evidence may bear further investigation....



Let this be a lesson; there is no free ride
 Just ask our editors kissing concrete outside
 They only wanted presents for themselves and a gal,
 But in the end all they got was a prison boyfriend named Sul.



Game gift packs price varies



If you haven't picked up these game compilations, they make great gifts:

- **Half-Life Adrenaline Pack:** includes *Half-Life*, *Opposing Force*, and *TFC*.
- **Half-Life Platinum Pack** (available by Christmas): same as the *Adrenaline Pack* plus *Counterstrike* and new mods.
- **Unreal Gold Pack:** includes *Unreal* and the *Return to Na Pali* pack.
- **Sid Meier's Civil War Collection:** includes full versions of *Sid Meier's Gettysburg*, *Sid Meier's Antietam*, and new *South Mountain* scenarios.

- **Spec Ops: Platinum Collection:** contains *Spec Ops: Rangers Lead the Way*, *Spec Ops: Ranger Team Bravo 100*, *Spec Ops II: Green Berets*, and *Spec Ops II: Operation Bravo*.

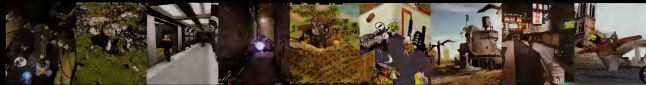
- **NASCAR Acceleration Pack:** includes *NASCAR Racing 3*, the *NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series Expansion Pack*, and *NASCAR Legends*.

Hot New Games Priceless

A swag bag of some of the best games of the year:

- *Baldur's Gate II* • *Diablo II* • *Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force* • *Unreal Tournament: Game of the Year Edition* (Includes new maps and two new gameplay modes) • *Age of Empires II* • *The Sims* • *Heavy Metal F.A.K.K. 2* • *Deus Ex* • *Crimson Skies*

Case closed — nobody can accuse these crooks of having bad taste.



LUMPS OF COAL

For that person you'd least like to see happy during the holidays (ie, "screwed"), we suggest the following gifts.



A PC GAMER FOOTBALL

(personally endorsed by "The Vede"): Greg Vederman took a PC Gamer foam football and scribbled his name on it. Endorsement or no, he ruined a perfectly good football.

COMPUTER GAMERS' BIBLE

(co-written by Rob Smith): Everything you could possibly want to know about playing games on your PC, from installing cards, building systems, to playing the games themselves, and getting down with the lingo of the Internet...it's all here! (SRP: \$34.99...bargain!)



THE "GAMES JUST FOR GIRLS" PACK:

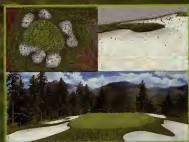
Apparently, "girl gaming" means playing *Barbie Magic Fairy Tales*, *Crayola Magic Wardrobe Paper Dolls*, *My Little Pony*, and *Pet Shop*. Does Gloria Allred



know about this? We can only imagine what the "Games Just For Boys" Pack will include.

ACTING
DESIGNER ASSISTANT FOR
Sergio García

WE PUT EVERY TREE, POND, AND SAND TRAP
EXACTLY WHERE THEY ARE ON THE REAL COURSES. SORRY.



Or with the Arnold Palmer Course Designer, you can design your own course and put everything exactly where you want. Either way, you'll get the most extensive Links upgrade ever thanks to all-new graphics and improved ball physics. So, grab your sticks and tee off as Arnold Palmer, Sergio García, Annika Sörenstam, or eleven amateur golfers in the most realistic golf experience ever seen.



Zone.com

MICROSOFT.COM/GAMES/LINKS2001

Microsoft



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AN INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION IN A WORLD of MAGIC

Danger awaits, hardy traveler,
in the turbulent lands of Arcanum!
Prepare potion or pistol, for armament is
a must! Encounter more than 500
friends and fiends of the oddest sort on
dozens of quests and campaigns.
Travel alone through this massive realm,

or invite companions to join you
online. And for those with discriminating
taste, we sport the most advanced
role-playing system ever created
in this or any
other reality.



Brigands beware! Eighty
spells in 16 Colleges are at
your disposal, while the
mechanically inclined can
construct wonders of the age
with 56 technological degrees
from eight disciplines.



An epic story with multiple
paths ensures you'll never
play a single or multiplayer
game the same way twice.
Or create your very own
online campaigns with the
Arcanum World Editor.



Dozens of quests and a limit-
less character design let you
decide the destiny of your
character, be it elf, half-orc
or other sundry races.



RECOMMENDED
RP
ESRB

Visit www.sarb.org
or call 1-800-771-3772
for more info.

ESRB
RATED
FOR
TEEN
GAME

TROIKA

SIERRA
STUDIOS

www.arcanum1.com



NO MAGES
ALLOWED

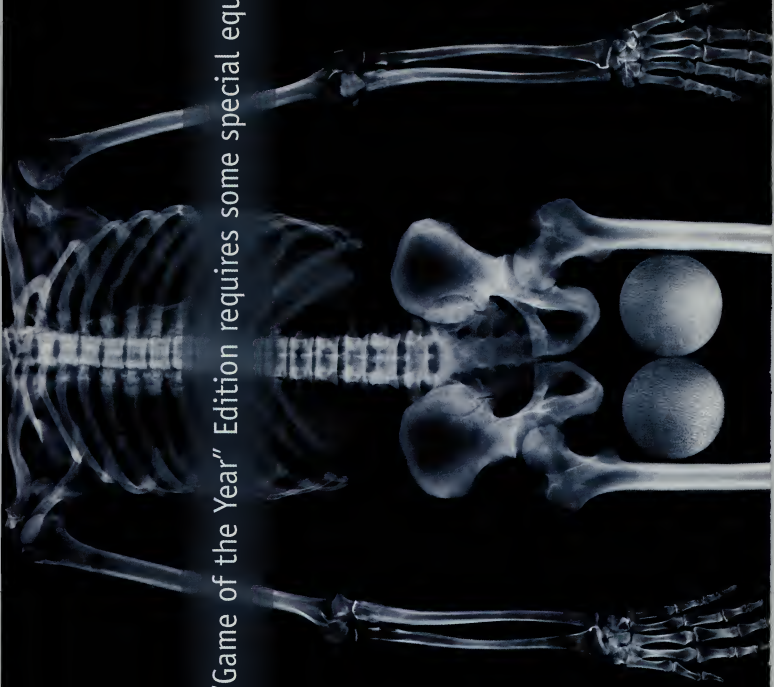
BULLETS & BRIMSTONE

Witness the metallurgical
might of the repeating
rifle or unleash the dark
arts of a Hellgate, as
a mechanical future
challenges a
magical past.

ARGANIUM™

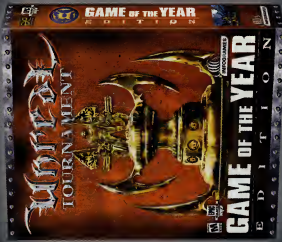
© OF STEAMWORKS & MAGICK OBSCURA ©

Our new "Game of the Year" Edition requires some special equipment.





Unreal Tournament's ballsy new "Game of the Year" Edition delivers its legendary first-person combat with all-new games (Tactical Ops, Chaos, Rocket Arena), skins, weapons and maps—all at an irresistible low price. Insane combat. Eye-popping graphics. Multiplayer heaven. Do you have what it takes to survive the gladiator bloodsport of the future?



It's just you and your opponent in hand-to-hand gladiator combat with Rocket Arena.



Check out insane new weapons including a sword, crossbow and Proximity Mines in Chaos.



Rampage through deadly cityscapes with real-world weapons in Tactical Ops.



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Diablo II image courtesy of Blizzard Entertainment.

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The Last Original

Throughout the rollercoaster ride of PC Gamer's history — the dizzying heights, the nauseating lows — one face has remained a constant from Day One. We speak, of course, of long-time managing editor Lisa Renninger. A stalwart anchor of the editorial room since the beginning, Lisa is moving on to a new publishing challenge in Chicago.

Lisa has worn many hats through the years. She's been the den mother to a rambunctious crowd of testosterone-fueled guys. She's been the voice of reason in unreasonable discussions (lots of those). She's dotted our I's and crossed our T's to make sure our often-illegible copy was as clean as it could be. And perhaps, most importantly, she's set and enforced deadlines for people who couldn't meet a schedule if their lives literally depended on it. In short, it's



Well guys, I'm blowing this popcicle stand!

safe to say that without Lisa at the wheel, PC Gamer would've probably never made it into your hands each month.

A tireless advocate of high editorial standards and even-handed games coverage, Lisa has never hesitated to push us all to be better than what we are — which is to say, better than a pack of unwashed, chronically narrow-minded geeks. Frankly, we're amazed she put up with us this long.

Lisa's departure marks the last of the original PC Gamer crew...we're officially on to PC Gamer: The Next Generation. Before the arguments begin about who is the better captain, Whilta or Smith, we take a moment to acknowledge the passing of an era in the gaming press. Lisa, farewell and good luck in the Windy City. Hard to believe — after five years as the den mother, you now get to be the Rambunctious One somewhere else!

Hardware Requirements

With each PC Gamer review in this issue, you'll find two very important pieces of information: the game's minimum hardware requirements and the hardware configurations we recommend as the least you'll need to really enjoy the game. While a game will run on the minimum system the manufacturer specifies, it might not run all that well. Because of this, we test each game on several systems so we can bring you a more realistic assessment of what you'll really need.

NEW AND IMPROVED RATING SYSTEM

Only the greatest should be rewarded with our coveted Editors' Choice award, and this tweak to the rating system reflects that. Now, at a glance at the score box on each page, you can see where the game fits in to the great gaming scheme of quality.

100%–90% EDITORS' CHOICE

We're battenning down the hatches and limiting our coveted Editors' Choice Award to games that score a 90 or higher. It's not easy to get here, and darn near impossible to get near 100. Games in this range come with our unqualified recommendation, an unreserved must-buy score.

89%–80% EXCELLENT

These are excellent games. Anything that scores in this range is well worth your purchase, and is likely a great example of its genre. This is also a scoring range where we might reward specialist/niche games that are real breakthroughs in their own way.

79%–70% GOOD

These are pretty good games, which we'd recommend to fans of the particular genre, although it's a safe bet there are probably better options out there.

69%–60% ABOVE AVERAGE

A reasonable, above-average game. It might be worth buying, but probably has a few significant flaws that limit its appeal.

59%–50% MERELY OKAY

Very ordinary games. Not completely worthless, but there are likely numerous better places to spend your gaming dollar.

49%–40% TOLERABLE

Poor quality. Only a few slightly redeeming features keep it from falling into the abyss of the next category.

39%–0% DON'T BOTHER

Just terrible. And the lower you go, the more worthless you get. Avoid these titles like the plague, and don't say we didn't warn you!

GAME OF THE MONTH

Each issue, we select a very special game as Game of the Month. This is reserved for the product that most completely captured our hearts and minds. To earn this mark, your game can't merely be Editors' Choice quality...that's a given. We're looking for something spectacular. And for this issue, the winner is...



STAR TREK VOYAGER: ELITE FORCE



p.138

EDITORS' CHOICE



Every month, we honor the best games we see with our Editors' Choice award. It's not easy to earn, and there are a lot of excellent games that fall just short of the honor. So when you see the PCG Editors' Choice logo on a game at a local software shop, you can bet it's among the best.

BALDUR'S GATE 2



p.146

NHL 2001



p.158

STEEL BEASTS



p.170

CATEGORY Action	REQUIRED P1 251, 64MB RAM, 650MHz hard-drive space, DVD 3D card
DEVELOPER Raven Software	WE RECOMMEND P1 251, 128MB RAM, 1045 3D card
PUBLISHER Activision	MAXIMUM PLAYERS 14

Star Trek Voyager Elite Force



Seven of nine gamers agree: Raven has broken the Star Trek curse once and for all, and we couldn't be happier.

W eird as it may seem, you should own *Elite Force*. Normally, this would be the point in a Star Trek game review when the well-meaning writer traces the lineage of lackluster Star Trek-licensed games, cleverly tossing off bad Trek puns like he were preparing on-stage convention banter for Bill Shatner, finally concluding that, yes, the current game du jour is a disappointment as well. But not this time.

Once again: You should own *Elite Force*. Your friends should own *Elite Force*. Your mother should own *Elite Force*. Even people who hate the TV shows should own *Elite Force*. Plainly and simply, it's a fantastic first-person shooter that shouldn't be dismissed purely because its title contains the two much-maligned words, "Star" and "Trek."

For the non-"Star Trek: Voyager" viewer (who certainly outnumber the dedicated

fans, here's a quick catch-up: The starship Voyager is lost light-years away from Federation space, somewhere in the Delta Quadrant. Its mission is to get home, while at the same time charting unexplored space, defending itself from hostile aliens, and picking up busy female hitchhikers guaranteed to raise ratings.

You play as Ensign Munro, a member of Voyager's Hazard Team, the vessel's special ops crew under the command of Lt. Commander Tuvok. Essentially, you're the best of the best of the best of lowly "red shirt" security personnel.

The action of this stirring first-person shooter starts off with an infiltration of a Borg cube. As you begin to move around the ship picking off clunky cyborg villains, the urge to stop and check out your surroundings is overpowering—the graphics are absolutely beautiful. A college degree in Trek lore is not required to play *Elite Force*, but fans will appreciate the obsessive attention to detail that goes into each and every level. Even *id* itself has never made the *Quake III* engine look this good.

Whether it's the murky, claustrophobic confines of the Borg cube, the spartan, militaristic decor of a Klingon battleship, or the bright, sanitary hallways of Voyager, *Elite*



The Arc Welder is a construction tool that packs quite a punch when used as a weapon.



Between missions, members of the Hazard Team relax with a few rounds of Five Card Stud.

Force never gives you the feeling that something "just doesn't look right." Likewise, the music (a new arrangement of the familiar theme song), special effects, and familiar voice-overs are excellent, with the notable exception of a deadpan Seven of Nine, unfortunately not voiced by actress Jeri Ryan.

ONCE MORE INTO THE BREACH

As the story progresses, Voyager becomes trapped in a spaceship graveyard called The Forge. Hundreds of other ships are also trapped there, many of them still manned. The Hazard Team is called upon to find a way to free Voyager while defending the ship from groups like the mysterious, cockroach-like Harvesters, and the Scavengers, a motley band of humans, Klingons, and others who plunder ships trapped in the Forge.

Between "away" missions, you interact with other crewmembers, test out new weapons on the Holodeck (in Old West, castle, and Klingon settings), and avert the odd catastrophe or two.

This downtime is a welcome change from "everything and the



Taking out a Borg distribution node puts the baddies in an unplanned slumber, and is an alternative to blowing them away with your I-Mod weapon.

Not all the hostile environments in *Elite Force* are alien, as these remnants from the classic "Mirror, Mirror" episode of the original Star Trek series could tell you...if they weren't vaporized by now.



kitchen sink" shooters throwing wave after wave of enemies at you, which seem to hope that you'll be so busy shooting you won't realize just how tedious it all is. Taking the best pacing aspects of *Half-Life*, *Thief*, and *Wing Commander*, *Elite Force* really makes you feel like you're part of the story.

In-game events are scripted using Raven's ICARUS scripting language, and make you an active participant in these set pieces rather than an idle bystander. Remember in *Unreal* when you first heard a Skaarj ripping apart fellow prisoners, and you couldn't do a damn thing about it? Now you're involved.

I jumped out of my seat the first time I accidentally disintegrated a crewmember by

activating on a shield before he could outrace a plume of flame...and the game didn't end! If you save him, he gives you a hint, but if not...well, life goes on (yours, at least). Most missions aren't solo, either. Other members of the Hazard Team accompany you — and they can die, get assimilated, or be so badly hurt that they have to beam back to Voyager.

Each one is a friend, too...you get to know them between missions, from their chatter during battle and by reading their detailed biographies in the menu system. Unlike the indistinct scientists inhabiting *Half-Life*, you may actually feel an unfamiliar pang of regret if a fellow crewmember goes to Red Shirt Heaven (and should you replay

the game, you may have a chance to save him next time — not all the deaths are scripted). My only complaint is that there aren't enough of these scripted events, especially in the latter half of the game.

THE DOGS OF WAR

Luckily, you've got enough firepower to give the bad guys a one-way ticket to the hereafter. I've really got to hand it to Raven — the weapons aren't just Trek-ified copies from *Quake III*. Not only are they different, but they're more balanced and varied in purpose. For example, the Borg essayed to become immune to most conventional weapons, so the I-Mod, a randomly

AROUND THE OFFICE

LJ Playing through *Elite Force* is more like living an episode of *Voyager* than playing a game. Your squad mates will take cover, shoot around corners, and watch your back. They'll keep you briefed on your situation. You can even explore the accurately modeled bridge and other parts of the ship.

LISA I like the way you have different people on your team during different parts of the game. It keeps things interesting and makes you feel more like a part of the overall *Voyager* team, fighting the good fight together. This feeling is much more inclusive than any other first-person shooter I've played.

ROB Who knew a Star Trek game could be this good? Credit to the story-tellers for avoiding any cheesy moments in the excellent cinematics, credit for the pacing and action, credit for the weapons and the multiplayer. Mostly, credit for not throwing tedious maze-crawling puzzles into the tight storyline.

GREG What a game! This will sound bad, but I find it unfortunate that it's set in the Star Trek universe — that fact is going to alienate a certain percentage of gamers right from the start. Still, goofy Star Trek universe or no, *Elite Force* is one of the best games of the year.

Check out the detail of the Borg ship. This is one of the most beautiful games to ever hit the PC Gamer office. And *Seven of Nine's* form-fitting battlesuit isn't bad, either.

85

90

BURNING QUESTIONS

Traskers like to nit-pick the intricate details of *Trek* plots, and *Elite Force* will be no different. After finishing the game, here are a few questions we had for Brian Pelletier, *Elite Force* project lead at Raven. SPOILER ALERT: DON'T READ THIS IF YOU WANT TO BE SURPRISED WHEN PLAYING THE GAME.



1 Why are Sela and Gowron selectable in Holomatch when they're not on "Voyager"? There are actually more non-"ST: Voyager" characters besides Sela and Gowron. Harry Lang, the director of interactive product development at Paramount, had the idea to add non-"Voyager" characters to the mix of characters to choose from for Holomatch. So we added four extra known characters from the Next Generation series and about four more random alien race characters.

2 Was that really a ship from "The Mirror Universe" we snuck through? And was the blue-shirted guy the evil McCoy? Yes it was a mirror universe ship, but it was not the mirror universe Enterprise, and therefore that was not evil McCoy in the blue shirt.

3 If Foster gets assimilated by the Borg, why isn't he beamed back to Voyager to have his implants removed as in *Seven of Nine*, instead of being left for dead? D'oh...I know we were forgetting something. Actually, we had bigger plans for Foster-Borg to show up later in the game, but due to time constraints and AI problems, we had to scrap our idea of having him show up at the end of the game to help destroy the Forge Boss. Since that was a last-minute decision, we didn't have time to go back and resolve the team leaving him behind. I personally think it works just fine as is, because it leaves more of an open ending for Foster and lets the player decide what might have happened to him.

4 One crew member's quarters has a poster of the Orion slave girl with a dedication. What does it say? The poster is in Rick Biessman's (of the Hazard Team) quarters and the dedication is to him. It says: "Rick, Thanks for the lovely evening. Salma."



The Scavenger Rifle shoots out rapid-fire crystal shards, with an explosive secondary fire mode.



Standard issue Federation plasma rifles disintegrate enemies with feature film-quality special effects.



Zooming your weapons looks just the way it would in an episode of "Star Trek Voyager."

modulating energy weapon, has to be used to penetrate Borg shields.

Each weapon (there are nine in all) has a secondary fire mode, usually emitting a concentrated version of the primary function. Your base weapon, the trusty phaser, has settings for both Stun and Vaporize, while the compound grenade launcher fires both explosive bouncing grenades and proximity mines.

On the receiving end of this hardware are a cast of classic Trek baddies like the Borg, Klingons, mirror-universe humans, Hirogens, and the Malon, as well as new creations like the Ethersians and Harvesters. Let's just say, you won't be bored.

And to be honest, you're not really given enough time for boredom to set in: the single-player game can be finished in under eight hours. That may seem obscenely brief in a marketplace where titles are increasingly taking upwards of 200-plus hours to complete, but Raven made the right choice. By cutting out the fat (maze-wandering, backtracking through levels for keycards), they've eliminated the tedious padding that slows down the second and third acts in most first-person shooters, leaving us with an action/adventure that's fun and exciting from beginning to end.

TREK GOES POSTAL

Besides, bellyaching about the length of the single-player game completely discounts the superb multiplayer experience. Playing Federation vs Klingon CTF — where each race's flag is held on the bridge of their respective vessels — is worth the sticker price alone. *Elite Force* ships with 12 deathmatch maps (nine of which aren't seen in the single-player game) and five all-new CTF maps (with Raven promising to have more available for download by the time you read this).

Scenarios include fights aboard Borg cubes, Federation cargo bays, and alien ships, along with the aforementioned fantasy maps in a castle and the Old West. Taking care not to boldly go where *Quake* already went, there are no jump-pads in sight; level design emphasizes transporters instead. Power-ups equivalent to *Quake III*'s Quad Damage (called a Weapon Enhancer, it's default setting is 3X damage). Haste,



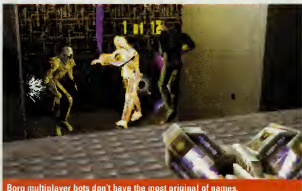
The Delta Flyer is Voyager's homemade space shuttle for reaching alien vessels that transporters can't.

Invisibility, Personal Transporter, Flight, Regeneration, and Gold Armor are all here, along with a few new strategic pick-ups. When activated, the Portable Force Field puts up a temporary barrier wherever you are on the map, especially useful when you have the enemy's flag and are being chased down a hallway. The Ultrium Explosive Charge is a bomb that can be placed any-

where, and then detonated from afar. And the Seeker Drone hovers above you, shooting at all enemies within range. Configuration nuts will be pleased, as well — you can alter the run speed, respawn rates, and even the power of the Weapon Enhancer.

The true multiplayer star, though, is the enhanced bot AI. Many a criticism has been leveled at the uncanny ESP of *Quake III*'s bots, always knowing a player's location. Well, let me tell you that I've given *Elite Force* the Turing test and it has passed with flying colors. After playing both real humans over LAN and Internet, and then the game's bots, I'm hard-pressed to tell the difference.

Bots hide, retreat, take cover, and snipe, yet never seem to have a cheap advantage over the player. The most impressive moment for me: during a bot match, I came across two bots trading shots in a hallway, each using the bulkhead for cover...just like characters from the show might. It's even more fun knowing that you can play as — or shoot at — some of the most beloved/infamous



Borg multiplayer bots don't have the most original of names.

characters from the show, like Captain Janeway, the Doctor, and Neelix...along with various alien bad guys and a few guest appearances from other Trek shows.

So, do whatever you have to do — take a magic marker and wipe out the words "Star Trek" on the box, have it mailed to you in a plain, brown wrapper, tell friends it's a gag gift — but buy this game. You'll never think about Star Trek games the same way again.

— Chuck Osborn

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Excellent story; great bot AI; beautiful graphics perfectly capture Star Trek environments.

LOWES: May be too short for some; not enough interactive scripting in second half of game.

BOTTOM LINE: The best Star Trek ever, and a first-rate FPS in its own right.

PC GAMER **93%**
EDITORS' CHOICE

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RECLAIM
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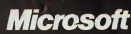
MECHWARRIOR⁴

VENGEANCE

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ACTUAL GAME FOOTAGE



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Wizards & Warriors

Not a fan of the *Baldur's Gate*-style RPG? Here's proof that there's still life left in the first-person roleplayer.

So *Baldur's Gate* comes out, bringing a new look for RPGs, lots of sales, and acclaim. Several large publishers take the opportunity to launch knock-offs. It looks like it will be an isometric future for roleplaying. That's until *Wizards & Warriors*, where Wizardry veteran D.W. Bradley unveils a first-person RPG so old-school that it feels downright revolutionary.

The setting is Gael Serran, a fantasy realm filled with typical fantasy races and one Certified, World-Conquering Megalomaniac. It's your job to restore freedom to all the little fairies and unicorns.

Combat is handled innovatively, though: battles stay in phased-turn mode at melee range, then switch to real-time when you fling attacks from a distance. It's actually a very cool balance. The spell system is similar to traditional *Wizardry*. There are six schools of 16 to 20 spells each, covering all the usual bases (offensive/defensive, single person/group effects, etc).

The 2D town screens are sort of disappointing (merchant hot-spots...yikes!), but the rest of Gael Serran is a colorful, full-3D, first-person compendium of lush environments. They're full of great artwork, elaborate textures, lengthened perspectives, and varied, fluid animation. In combat you can actually watch an arrow lodge in a wounded foe, and nothing beats sending a Burn spell after a fleeing troll just as it crests a distant ridge. Good as it looks with software rendering at 800x600, the



You can change the frequency and difficulty of combat encounters using controls in the Options Menu.



When you join the Wizards' Guild, you gain access to their stock of rare goodies — for a hefty price, of course.

game looks still better at higher resolutions under 3D hardware acceleration.

Less successful is the sometimes quirky interface. For example, you can't back out of screens by using the Escape key, nor can you use numbered shortcuts to switch among your six party members. Some game design choices are annoying, too. Item pickup after a successful battle is a complete mess that depends on clicking on goodies from the right angle. (The game will try to move your party around if you can't grab something. I owe a painful drop down a 20' shaft to this quirk.) And since the game doesn't maintain a common money pool, you have to click on the Pool button whenever switching characters to gather money and buy items. It's a drag.

Wizards & Warriors does reveal a master hand at storytelling, slowly weaving together a variety of plots. The dialogue itself is less assured than *Baldur's Gate*, however, which throws a bit of a wrench into the finely tuned story. Particularly annoying are the times when a narrator's voice tells you directly what you should feel — after all, if the narrator wants you to be awestruck or frightened by a room or NPC, the visuals and sound effects should accomplish it without relying on a narrator's instruction.

Still, the game gets more impressive as you play it. Its balance, graphics, and excellent mix of traditional RPG elements enable *Wizards & Warriors* to hold its own against the competition. It should particularly appeal to players who enjoy the visceral thrill of a



Skeletons are apt to rise out of the ground in front of you, and attack. And they're laughing at you.

first-person environment and combat, providing an effective contrast in this respect to the third-person *Baldur's Gate II*. Try alternating sessions between the two, and see how long you can hold out before the need for sleep and intravenous feeding take over.

— Barry Brunesal

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Excellent game balance; good 3D graphics; mild learning curve; strong AI.

LOWS: Mediocre interface; poor dialogue display; annoying soundtrack.

BOTTOM LINE: A bit clunky, but provides a good RPG experience over the long run.

PC GAMER **74%**
GOOD

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PUBLISHER Hasbro

REQUIRED P1 230, 32MB RAM, 20MB hard-disk space, MIB 133 accelerator card
WE RECOMMEND P1 450, 64MB RAM, 16MB 200 accelerator card, wheel
MAXIMUM PLAYERS 16

REVIEWS

NASCAR Heat

Move over, Papyrus...there's a hot new rookie in town that may just steer you clear off the tracks.

When it comes to serious Winston Cup racing simulations, Papyrus' NASCAR Racing series has pretty much enjoyed an unchallenged run at the head of the field for the past five years. Although EA has taken a half-hearted charge at them with its own NASCAR-branded gaming franchise, Hasbro's NASCAR Heat is the first contender with enough octane in the tank to give the Papyrus juggernaut a run for its money.

Featuring 26 licensed drivers and 19 official tracks—including the Daytona Speedway— from the real-world Winston Cup circuit, Heat delivers more than enough authentic background to keep the stalwarts satisfied. Richly detailed track textures impart a real sense of velocity as you fly over each circuit's uniquely shaded racing grooves, and Heat's surrounding trackside scenery is as drop-dead gorgeous as any I've ever seen.

The cars are equally well-rendered and can be admired from a number of imaginative camera angles while on the track or when viewed from the superb VCR-style replay screen. If graphics were the sole criteria for judging a NASCAR sim, Heat would easily be burning donuts in the victory lane.

Serious pile-ups like this are quite rare in NASCAR Heat due to the AI vehicle's uncanny ability to avoid losing control when you hit them.

NASCAR Heat is much more than just a pretty paint job, however. In addition to its conventional Single Race and Championship options, it offers two of the most entertaining gameplay modes I've seen in a driving title. The deliciously addictive "Beat the Heat" mode challenges you to carve a perfect set of corners or attain a specific finishing position over 39 pre-set "what if" scenarios, while the "Race the Pro" option defies you to better a number of ghost car laptimes established by 11 Winston Cup drivers. Rarely has a more diverting pair of gameplay premises ever steered their way into the heart of a serious racing sim.

The game features both a casual and an advanced driving model, in order to appeal to a wide cross-section of gamers. Each one succeeds at offering more bang for the buck than either of Papyrus' or EA's current efforts. The arcade-like Standard mode allows you to jump straight into the action without the need to tweak your car, while Expert mode actually manages to improve on the advanced vehicle dynamics found in NASCAR 3. Brake lockups and pitch sensitivity (when transitioning from the banking to the flat apron) are nicely conspicuous, and dedicated simmers will delight in the game's full-featured and responsive garage menu. When combined with Heat's challenging AI



Animated pit stops and a unique "chassis-cam" view are just a few of the bonuses offered with NASCAR Heat.

and unparalleled representation of close-quarters NASCAR competition, it's hard to see how anyone could do it any better.

Unfortunately, the sugar cubes in NASCAR Heat's gas tank ultimately prevent it from drafting by N3 and into the lead. Horrendously forgiving damage modeling combines with some brain-dead AI behavior during cautions and pit stops to kill much of each race's forward momentum. The force-feedback effects are weak, and the Internet multiplayer functionality is a lap behind the competition's smooth set-ups. While a recent patch addresses some of these concerns, there is still clearly quite a bit more work to be done before Heat's restrictor plate can truly come off.

With NASCAR 4 looming on the horizon, it's a pretty safe bet that the racing sim bar is going to be raised a few more notches in the not too distant future. If this does happen, then the Papyrus crew should breathe a collective sigh of relief. NASCAR Heat, despite all its teething problems, is really only a patch or two away from blowing N3 right into the weeds.

— Andy Mahood

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Superb Winston Cup cars and tracks; impressive physics; addictive "scenario" modes.

LOWS: Forgiving damage modeling; idiot AI moments; poor net support; weak force-feedback.

BOTTOM LINE: Definitely flawed, but still a serious threat to Papyrus' stranglehold.

PC GAMER 80%
EXCELLENT

CATEGORY Role-playing

DEVELOPER BioWare

PUBLISHER Interplay/Black Isle

REQUIRED P3 233, 32MB RAM, 800MB hard-drive space, 4MB DirectX video card

WE RECOMMEND P3 350, 64MB RAM, 1.5GB hard-drive space, 16MB 3D card

MAXIMUM PLAYERS 6

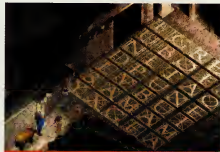
Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn

The fine Black Isle roleplaying game tradition continues with the release of this huge sequel to one of our favorites.

So I'm sitting there in Athkatla's notorious Red Flagon Inn, nursing my bruised body and ego with a few pints, and trying to ignore the proprietor Thurlburp's claim to fame, when it hits me. If Jaheira and Aerik can nail those Giant Trolls with their Cloud Kill and Chaos spells from a distance, and Minsc and Valygar can hold them off with their melee weapons, Nalia and I could probably issue the coup de grace with fire arrows. Of course!

Imbued with new confidence (and a little buzzed off the ale), I gather up the party. This time, we will win the day, or die trying — again. Victory will bring me one step closer to figuring out just what in the hell is happening here in Amn.

Welcome to *Baldur's Gate II*, a fantasy world that is more vast, more rich in color and characters, and more dangerous than that you traveled in *Baldur's Gate* and its add-on, *Tales of the Sword Coast*. If you're a *BG* veteran (and there are hundreds of thousands of you out there), this is one sequel that won't let you down. With better artwork (800x600 resolution in 32-bit color is supported, as well as nearly twice any many frames of animation for character models), a completely new and more involved story, 100 new spells (for a total of 300), new character classes and weapon proficiencies, scores of new monsters to



Now where have you seen this puzzle before? Perhaps in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*?

waste, and literally hundreds of non-player characters to interact with, *BG II* is far more than a rehash of the original.

If you actually missed the original, you'll draw no penalty for starting with this game. *BG II*'s characters will fill you in on the important story details from *BG* as you

Best not to tangle with this beast if you can at all help it, and if you've been diligent in your dungeon exploration, you can



play. (Vets will benefit from being able to skip over flashback conversations.)

From the all-important character creation screen you must choose all the proper ingredients for your hero. You start the saga alone, and other characters will join along the way — you can travel with up to six characters at a time. Make no mistake, however: you are the leader, and it's important to take your time selecting your character's attributes before jumping into the game. If you can't wait, there are some pre-created characters to select as well — but what fun is that?

There's one new race to play as, the Half-Orc, which makes a fine choice for prospective warriors out there — plus there are a few surprises in store for AD&D fans interested in the Drow and the Underdark. The three new character classes are Sorcerer, Monk, and Barbarian. These join the already impressive list of classes from the original, including Bard, Mage, Paladin, Ranger, and Druid. The biggest advantage to the new game is that your character begins play somewhere between 5th and 7th experience level, giving him a fighting chance of survival out of the gate.

Because it's a 100-plus hour game (probably 200 hours if you try to complete each and every quest), it's obviously important for you to be comfortable with your character. You're going to be with him for a while! And, if you wish, you can create and control all six of the characters in your party by playing through the game in multiplayer mode. (The multiplayer mode also allows you to play through the game with five other people, over LAN or Internet.)

Better still, if you liked the character with which you beat *BG* and *Tales of the Sword Coast*, you can import that character into *BG II* (and you'll be able to import that character from *BG II* into BioWare's next RPG, *Neverwinter Nights*). For balancing reasons, you won't have all of your goodies



Like soldiers in war, sometimes you need to bring the artillery down on your own head to win the day.

from *BG* — such as your Defender +5. (Sorry, folks. I know it hurts.)

There are 16 NPCs who can join your party. As you complete or start certain quests, you may need to boot someone to make room for a new member (note: always have a thief in the party!). Once an NPC joins up with you, you can control them in battle and alter their attributes to your liking as they gain experience. (Heck, you can even alter the portraits, scripts, and AI of all the characters in the game if you want.

MORE QUESTS THAN EVER

I'm not going to spend much time on the story, as it has many twists and surprises that would be all too easy to spoil. It's more epic in scope (there are at least a hundred sub-quests) and it will involve you much more than the original did — the choices you make have much more impact on the story than before. It picks up a short time after you bested that bad boy Sarevok in *Baldur's Gate*, and you learned the truth about your ancestry. You find yourself imprisoned in a dungeon, tormented by an



Shut the hell up already, Aerie — we've had enough of your ceaseless prattle and goodness!

unknown captor. From there you must escape and hook up with other members of your old party — Imoen, Jahiera, and Minsc.

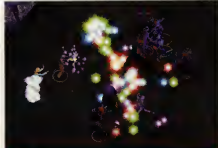
There are so many quests that by Chapter 2 of 7, I was really beginning to think there were too many. I didn't know what to do or where to go next! (This was mostly my own fault, as I just can't say no to a good quest.) And most quests have several branches to them, as opposed to *BG* where many were very short "go there and fetch this" (or "FedEx") variety.

Thankfully, the game subtly pushes you in the right direction via NPC prompts. Take my advice; say no to a couple of the non-critical quests early on, and try to take them on one or two at a time. It'll make your progress less confusing.

Your early play will mostly be in the capital city of Athkatla. From there you'll go to the farthest reaches of the land, which include the city of Trademeet, the Umar Hills, Temple Ruins, the cities of the Underdark, and the Astral plane. The environments are sufficiently varied to those you traversed in the original, and you can



The locales are varied in their flora and fauna — not to mention their beasts bent on ripping your head off!



Spell effects look better than ever and will tax your 3D accelerator. (You do have one by now, right?)

PICTURE PERFECT

Because you can import your own portraits for the characters in your party, we thought we'd throw out some suggestions for you:



ARNOLD: Should play: *Your character.* Arnold showed in *Predator* that he has what it takes to lead a small party of warriors.



ALYSSA MILANO: Should play: *Aerie.* Having a gorgeous woman play her makes all that whining easier to take.



BUZZ LIGHTYEAR: Should play: *Vallygar.* At least the voice will match the picture, certainly in my humble opinion.



CATHERINE ZETA JONES: Should play: *Nalia.* A good thief should look good in tight pants, don't you think?



LAETITIA CASTA (THE VICTORIA'S SECRET SUPERMODEL): Should play: *Jabeira.* Why? Why the hell not!

travel instantaneously to each new area, instead of having to walk to and fro.

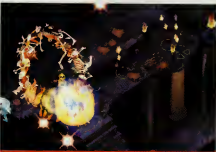
Vital locations are marked nice and bright for you on the map when you enter a city or city section. In *Baldur's Gate*, you had to explore each city fully to find taverns, markets, temples, and such. This time around you can also annotate the map yourself, marking the location of locked chests to return to, for example. The journal is also much improved, with tabs for current and completed quests (sorted by chapter, and name or date), a tab for automatic journal entries, and a tab for your own entries, making it an invaluable tool.

FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

As with *BG*, combat is based on the 2nd Edition AD&D rules and occurs in real-time. You can pause the action at any time by hitting the spacebar, or you can choose to have the action pause automatically each time one of the character's turn in combat is ended. You can also turn off the party AI to make it more like a traditional turn-based



Best not to steal when there are people around to see. Justice comes swiftly and without mercy.



The action can get sluggish, even on a beefy machine, when there's this much going on at once.



Fighting the beasts later in the game will take all of your skill and good combat management.

game as well. *BG II* really deserves major kudos for being very highly configurable, and thus able to suit a wide range of playing styles and preferences. Heck, you can even alter the combat difficulty on the fly!

Okay, so all these blemishes are big enough of one complaint? Well, that's because there really isn't much to complain about. *BG II* is a bigger version of the original, with lots of subtle improvements. Its main fault may be that it's too much like the original in look and feel, but that's like damning *Return of the Jedi* for being too much like *Star Wars*.

There are a handful of minor irritations (Ewoks, if you will). Some are new, others carry-overs. For example, you still get that highly repetitive and immensely irritating "You must gather your party before venturing forth" message every time you exit an area. Character path-finding is less than ideal in confined or cluttered areas (that said, the path-finding is improved compared to *Baldur's Gate*).

Additionally, there's some really poor timing in conversations with various party

members. For example, immediately after one prolonged, sweat-inducing battle in which one character was killed, Aerie decides to tell Jabeira that her hair looks very pretty. D'oh! Talk about bad timing.

None of these blemishes are big enough to bring down a fantastic Black Isle offering. *Baldur's Gate II* may not have the "wow" factor of the original, it's a better game in many respects and a must-have in any estimation.

— Steve Klett

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Higher-res artwork; more involving story; extremely deep and configurable.

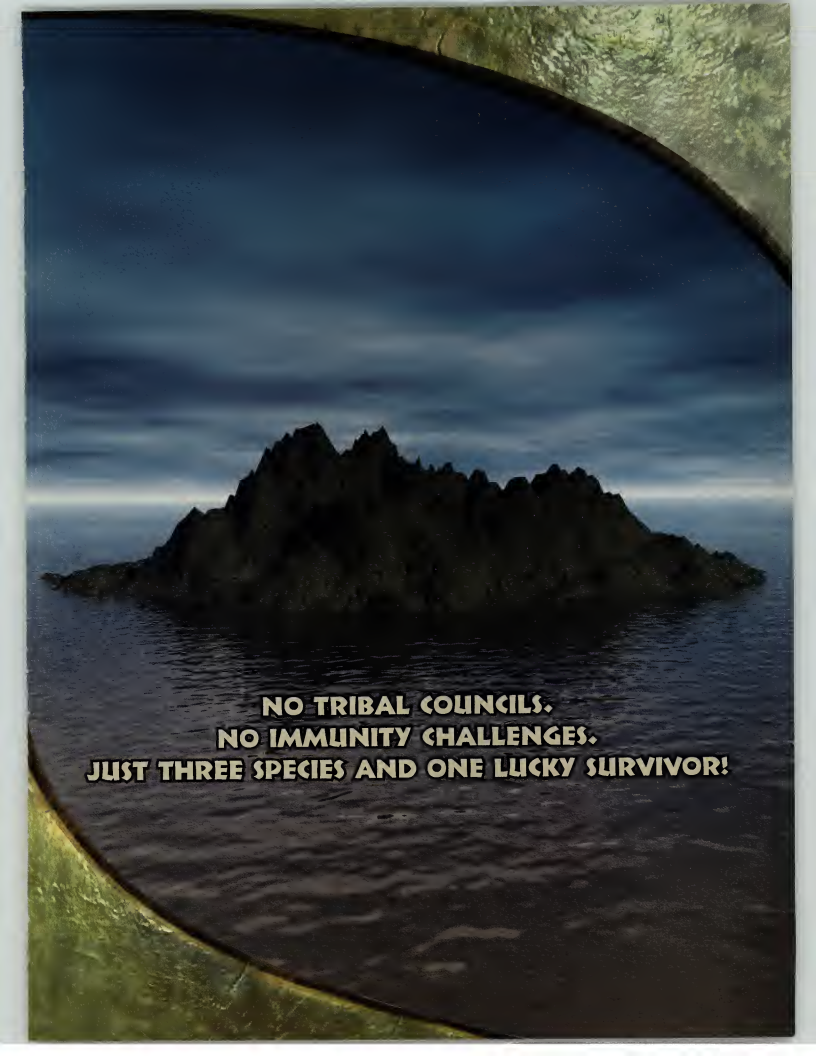
LOWS: Annoying character conversations; path-finding is still a problem.

BOTTOM LINE: A bigger, prettier, better version of *Baldur's Gate* that's sure to satisfy.

PC GAMER

91%

EDITORS' CHOICE

A dark, jagged island silhouette is centered in a stormy sea, viewed through a circular frame. The sky is dark and cloudy, and the water is dark with whitecaps. The text is overlaid on the lower half of the image.

**NO TRIBAL COUNCILS.
NO IMMUNITY CHALLENGES.
JUST THREE SPECIES AND ONE LUCKY SURVIVOR!**



HITECH

GIANTS
CITIZEN KABUTO

MASTERS OF DESTRUCTION

MECCS:

Ship damaged beyond repair, the Meccaryn squad is stranded on the island with enough firepower to destroy a small planet. Armed to the teeth with rocket launchers, grenades, millennium mortar, and sniper rifles; Baz, Tel, Reg, Gorden and Bennett are hi-tech damage dealing masters of destruction. With guns blazing the Meccs are fast on their feet and quicker in the air with jet packs as they scout the island traveling in packs and moving in formation.

The poor bastards don't stand a chance.

"I was blown away by this game ... One of the must have games of the fall... An instant classic of huge proportions." -- Gamers Pulse.com



Armor up with sniper rifles, machine guns, and pop-up bombs.



Rule the sky with the Mecc-copter and hi-tech jet pack.



Battle alien creatures in teams with up to 10 players in multiplayer.



EXOTIC



IANTE
CITIZEN KABUTO

RULERS OF THE SEA

DELPHI THE SEA REAPER:

Driven from their island home to the deepest reaches of the ocean, the Sea Reapers live in exile beyond the reach of the island's brutal number one resident. Commanding the elements of earth, air, sea and fire, the ethereal females wage war with magic spells, lightning bows, and an indestructible scimitar of steel. Calling upon years of rage, Delphi summons all the powers of the sea in the form of a wall of fire, suffocating vortex and dangerous sea creatures in her mission to return home.

As Beautiful and Dangerous as the Sea itself.

"The game's excellent character designs, impressive visual style, and real-time strategy and action elements blend together incredibly well, making Giants: Citizen Kabuto a breath of fresh air in a market glutted with clones." ... Gamespot.com



Driven into the sea by Kabuto, the ethereal Reapers command devastating powers.



Lightning bows, spells and the Scimitar are a Reaper's best defense.



Mecc technology vs Reaper magic...Delphi summons deadly sea monsters and tornadoes.






LUMBERING MOUNTAIN

KABUTO:

Summoned by the Sea Reapers to defend the island, this giant ferocious beast is simply too brutal to exist with any other creature. Ten times the height of anything on the island, Kabuto is a uniquely nasty creature. Pray he swallows you whole rather than making a fashion statement by wearing a struggling you on his razor sharp spikes, keeping his hands free to crush the rest of your team with an elbow smash. You'll need every ounce of firepower to take down this fang-filled eating machine.

"He can't wait to eat...er...meet you!"



"With a complex story and beautifully crafted 3-D graphics, the single-player game offers the kind of depth that's been sorely lacking in action games lately." -- Rolling Stone

OF PAIN



Eat, crush, and destroy anything in your path as Kabuto.



Through the fangs of Kabuto is the only way off the island.



Defeat this massive monster or end up an appetizer.



www.interplay.com

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CATEGORY	Action/Adventure	REQUIRED	PI 256, 23MB RAM, 20MB hard drive space
DEVELOPER	Konami	WE RECOMMEND	PI 320, 64MB RAM, 3D accelerator card, gamepad
PUBLISHER	Konami	MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS	None

Metal Gear Solid

This console port suffers from PlayStationitis, but it may be worth your time if you haven't played it before.

As a devout PlayStation guy back in my college days, I loved *Metal Gear Solid*. It was a great interactive cinematic experience, with incredible in-engine cutscenes, and a storyline head and shoulders above typical videogame fluff. Some would even say that *Metal Gear Solid* is to the PlayStation what *Half-Life* is to the PC.

In *Metal Gear Solid*, you take on the role of Solid Snake, a special forces operative brought out of retirement to resolve a terrorist situation in Alaska. It appears that an elite group of "Next Generation Special Forces" has taken over a nuclear weapons depot and plan on popping off nukes if the U.S. doesn't give in to their demands. These soldiers-gone-bad are a collection of eccentric and specialized commandos, each with their own weird names. There's Sniper Wolf, a deadly and beautiful sharp shooter; Vulcan Raven, a guy that carries a massive vulcan mini-cannon strapped to his back; Revolver Ocelot, master of the quick draw, and many more. Your job is to infiltrate the facility and take them down.

The story unfolds through a mix of in-engine cutscenes brimming with Hollywood production values, audio dialogue through your Codec (a communicator built into your character's ear), and full-motion video.

Most of the game is played from an overhead perspective (with the exceptions of when you're using binoculars, using the



The camera automatically changes when you lean against an object to give you a view of what's around the corner.

Look button to scope out an area, or sniping). Control is best with a gamepad, though is a bit sensitive in first-person mode, making aiming cumbersome.

Metal Gear Solid is a sneaker at heart. While you will find yourself in wild firefights, most of your time is spent avoiding the enemy. To make things easier, a personal radar system tells you where the guards are and what their cone of vision is. You'll need it, because these guards are smart. They follow footprints, hear you when you step in puddles, and see your breath in the cold.

However, there will be times when detection is unavoidable. In these situations, Snake can punch out guards or even grab them and break their necks. As you get further in the game, you'll eventually scrounge up an impressive arsenal, including remote-controlled missiles, assault rifles, and even claymore landmines. Trust me, you'll need every bit of it.

About 99 percent of the PlayStation game is intact, and a few extras have been thrown in. First off, if you start a game on the "very easy" setting, you'll have a silenced



Each member of the special forces terrorist group appears as a boss. Here's Psycho Mantis, a master of telekinetic and psychic attacks.



Whenever a guard sees you, the alarm will go off and a counter begins to count down from 99. Stay hidden till it reaches zero, and the alarm will turn off.

THE VR MISSIONS

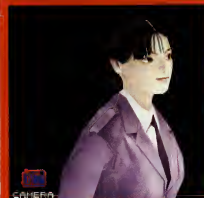
Originally, *Metal Gear Solid: VR Missions* was released as a stand-alone game for the PlayStation. It was basically an expansion of the virtual reality training missions that are in the original game. Microsoft has included the full VR Missions game in *Metal Gear Solid: The VR Missions* as a series of goal-based training missions set in a *Matrix*-like virtual reality settings. While they're not exactly a full game, they are a nice diversion for the hardcore *Metal Gear Solid* fan.



The VR missions can be played in any order and range from sneaking to full-on combat.



Perhaps the coolest part of the VR missions is that you get to play as the cyborg ninjas.



The VR missions include a photo shoot mode with the game's female cast (hmm, wonder why?).



Eventually, you'll have to find some hardware to take out this Hind attack chopper.



You'll meet a few allies along the way. Meryl plays a vital role in determining which ending you get.



These buddies really like to torture people. Get ready to have a turn on their table of fun.

MP5 with unlimited ammo in your inventory right off the bat. You'll also be able to play in high-res mode. Sadly, Microsoft didn't add any more polygons, or bump up the texture resolution (at least not in any noticeable way). As a result, some characters are blocky, and the textures look stretched out. There's no force feedback support, either.

Thankfully, some of great console touches have been recreated. For example, there's a certain boss who can read your mind. In the PlayStation version, to beat him you had to unplug your controller and put it into the second slot. Then you were able to hurt the boss because he could no longer "read your mind." This was translated perfectly to the PC without the need to unplug your controller. I won't give away the secret, but I must applaud Microsoft on a job well done.

In all, this is an excellent port. But what kind of score does an aging PlayStation blockbuster deserve on the PC? It's hard to

say. Personally, I enjoyed it very much, but then again, I'm a console owner so I know what to expect. I can easily see hardcore PC owners scoffing at *Metal Gear Solid*, but if anyone is willing to put up with console-style gameplay (floating power-ups and all) in return for a fun and entertaining ride, *Metal Gear Solid* is worth the time.

—Li C. Kuo

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Exact copy of the PlayStation hit — sweet cinematics, voice acting, and gameplay.

LOWS: Exact copy of the PlayStation hit — all the clipping, low-res textures, and console controls.

BOTTOM LINE: A chance for PC gamers to experience the best of the last generation of console games.

PC GAMER
GOOD

79%

NHL 2001

After many successful versions, this is finally the game that will make hockey purists happy with EA Sports.

Hockey is a treasured sport, remarked upon in bars with the same historic reverence that veterans reserve for their war stories. That's the reason for grumbling over EA Sports' NHL series: as fantastic as the series has always been, the games have been less than totally realistic. Brutal hits and swift action have always been the order of the day, which is why the real hockey purists have always had to bite their lips while enjoying the fast-paced action.

The moans should all be remedied once these grognards-on-ice get hold of *NHL 2001*. This annual update has done something once thought impossible by both sides of the arcade/simulation fence — delivered enough eye-candy and accessible control to wow the general public, while letting the sim fan tweak the game sufficiently to better emulate the real pro game. I say it's about time!

The designers accomplished this seemingly difficult task by including a set of sliders to alter many of the game's play mechanics. My one biggest complaint with the NHL series has always been the inordinate number of shots taken during a game.



Teeth-rattling hits are what makes the NHL series the game of choice for those who want to take out their aggressions without going to jail.



A "one timer" is a quick pass to someone in front of the goal who ricochets the puck home.

With one swipe of the slider marked "shot accuracy," I now have a game that performs much closer to my idea of how a hockey game should play. In all, there are about 20 different adjustments you can make including puck friction, hitting power, pass accuracy, speed burst length, and how far the rebounds will get away from the goalie.

NHL 2001 would easily be worth the price of the upgrade if all it had were the addition of the sliders, but as it turns out, there's a whole lot more meat on this very tasty bone. The new momentum meter does a great job of emulating what really happens when a team gets on a roll (or when they lose their confidence and play back on their heels), by making the surging team's moves feel a bit crisper and their hits more forceful. The addition of the "aggressiveness" slider goes a long way toward making the computer's defenders

CATEGORY Sports	REQUIRED PIII, 32MB RAM, 150MB hard-drive space
DEVELOPER EA Sports	WE RECOMMEND PIII 450, 128MB RAM, 600MB hard drive space, 3D card
PUBLISHER EA Sports	MAXIMUM PLAYERS 2



There's nothing quite like the sight of two dozen blood-thirsty Canadian boys skating to glory.



TECH: GUYO BELLEGRUN RUNNING
MOMENT IS IN THE CORNER WITH
THE CANALS

All San Jose fans join me in the cheer: "Bellllll-four! Bellllll-four! Bellllll-four!"

IT'S ALIVE!

Introduced in *NHL 2000*, EA Sports' questionable "face-in-the-game" technology returns in *NHL 2007*. The basics remain pretty much the same — import a picture in .jpg format, and then maneuver the reference points around the skull, eyes, mouth, and nose to produce your doppelgänger. It's a lot easier to go back and edit the outcome in *NHL 2007*. Unfortunately, no matter how much you tweak the points, the results are borderline frightening, as you can see from these screens. There just aren't enough tweakable points to properly do justice to the facial features. Hence, anyone you create tends to look like a reject from the lab of Dr. Frankenstein.



The Theory of Evolution.

The Jersey editor works somewhat better, but it's still rather primitive. After choosing your shirt design, you can import a .jpg picture to use as your logo. You can also choose a background from among various shapes (oval, triangle, square, etc.), but any part of the logo that leaves the border of the backlight disappears. While it's great that EA Sports gives us features like personalizing the game, the tools are much too limited. Hopefully, future editions will give users more functionality. In the meantime, enjoy your homemade mutant squad!



We may be out-of-shape, no-talent shubs in real life, but at least we'd look the part with nifty jerseys like these.



Tight defense is a welcome change in the NHL series, with defensively sound play in front of the net.



A part of hockey I hope will never disappear: two big guys punching the crap out of each other.



The graphics are phenomenal, even when set to the lower resolutions such as 600x600 (as seen here).

actually play tough defense. Even the commentary has been improved, with color commentator Bill Clement adding a lot of fresh and interesting insights without being overly repetitive. And if you thought the graphics had reached a zenith last year, get set to gaze in amazement as the series makes yet another leap forward.

In fact, the only people I wouldn't recommend the game to are those looking for online play exclusively. Too many times, the game will lock up and force you to quit out. I was playing over the Internet through EA Sports' matchmaking system for league and head-to-head play; you may find that a direct IP connection or modem-to-modem play is more stable and worth your time. Of course, you can always get a few buddies around the computer, which is the best multiplayer option of all.

For longtime fans of the series, this is the game we've always been hoping the NHL series would become. All that you

loved in the past has returned with bells and whistles on, and the many new options allow you to shape the game in your own image (i.e. sliders, improved face-in-the-game feature, customizable teams, logos, and jerseys, etc.). If you've sworn off the NHL series because of its bent toward the arcade gamer, all I can say is to give it another try...you'll like what you'll see.

— Rob Smoika

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Customizable in every way; momentum meter; lots of improvements, including the graphics.

LOWS: Internet play is still hit-or-miss; frame rate on auto replays is very choppy on lower-end PCs.

BOTTOM LINE: Finally, a hockey game that should appeal to every level of fan.

PC GAMER 92%
EDITORS' CHOICE

Crimson Skies

Consider this the *Need for Speed* of flight sims...it's easy to pick up, but hard to put down.

It's 1937 and the free world is not as we remember it: The United States has fallen apart after the stock market crash, railways have been destroyed, and the only way to transfer goods is through the use of massive zeppelins. Within this alternate history, groups of air pirates prey on the splintered remnants of America, as mini-nations such as the Nation of Hollywood, the Kingdom of Hawaii, and the Republic of Texas emerge from the wreckage.

These fledgling nations aren't going to take the abuse lying down. They've formed their own militias to keep the skies clean of the pirate scum. You come in somewhere in the middle — known as "the gentleman pirate," Nathaniel Zachary and his Fortune Hunters are closer to Robin Hood and his band of merry men than Blackbeard and his treacherous crew.

Your Fortune Hunters operate out of your own zeppelin called the Pandora. From here, you'll be briefed on missions, create your own planes (see sidebar), and prepare for sorties. The briefings are voiced-over by your character, Nathaniel Zachary, and are conducted at a map screen that shows all your waypoints. Stylized black and white pictures show your objectives, and the entire crew will pipe in from time to time with witty little comments, all



In this mission, you have to protect the survivors of this downed zeppelin.



Flying through a Hollywood film studio really shows off the terrain detail.

thanks to a happy band of voice actors that revel in their over-acting. Between and during missions, you'll be treated to in-engine cinematics and pre-rendered cutscenes to advance the story, which wallows gleefully in Golden Age aerial style.

There are some spectacular missions. When a Hollywood starlet wants to be kidnapped, you pose as a stunt pilot for a film shoot. While you're doing your aerial thing, your buddy on the ground commandeers the starlet's trailer. It's then up to you to clear a path for that trailer. You'll blow open gates, blast apart police roadblocks, and do everything in your power to ensure its safe passage. At the end of the mission, you'll have to use a rope ladder to pick up the starlet from the speeding trailer.

Crimson Skies does a terrific job of mixing up the mission types and keeping you interested. There wasn't really any time when I felt that the game was getting tedious or repetitive.

Naturally, in a flying game like *Crimson Skies*,

control can make all the difference, and Zipper has done a great job. Slow, heavy planes feel like the sluggish flying tanks that they are, while faster, more agile planes are as nimble as an Olympic gymnast. Whatever you do, though, don't call it a

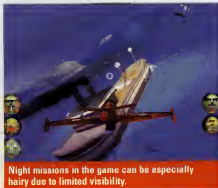
MAKE IT PERSONAL

Crimson Skies lets you build your own fighter plane. You can choose your chassis, weapons loadout, engine, and even modify your paint job. While not vital to the game, it's a real blast to play around with.



Here's the Super Kibbler. I've stuck the fastest engine and the biggest guns onto this puppy. Strike first, strike fast, strike hard!

CATEGORY Action	REQUIRED P200, 32MB RAM, 300MB hard-drive space
DEVELOPER Zipper Interactive	WE RECOMMEND P1600, 128MB RAM, 1GB hard-drive space, 3D card
PUBLISHER Microsoft	MAXIMUM PLAYERS 1



Night missions in the game can be especially hairy due to limited visibility.



Outfit your plane with an array of weaponry, including armor-piercing and explosive shells.

flight sim — the physics are pure arcade, and thankfully so, given the light-hearted tone of the story. This game is designed to get you in the sky and dog fighting easily and quickly. A spyglass screen shows you where your opponents are and what direction they're flying, and arrows help you find them. The targeting system is simple; just

hit one button to target enemies, and another to target friendlies, and one more for mission objectives. Combat is fast-paced — let an enemy plane get behind you and you'll be down in flames in no time. Jinking is the word of the day. Just make sure you have a decent joystick as the game is virtually unplayable with anything else, and stay away from using an optical mouse because we've experienced some bugs with our Microsoft Intellimouse (such as extreme sensitivity outside of the deadzone).

Zipper did a terrific job of creating planes that look like they could really have existed during the 1930s. Everything from the X-wing configuration of the Hughes Devastator to the sleek and speedy look of the Bloodhawk is constructed believably while still retaining a high "coolness" factor. The terrain is beautifully detailed when it comes up close. The *Crimzon Skies* engine handles draw-in by having objects fade in, rather than the usual pop-up effect. So if you're flying high, you'll see very little detail, but as you get closer to the ground you'll see buildings, trees, cars, and streets slowly appear. This system isn't exactly perfect. Its flaws become very noticeable in the later New York levels, where the buildings fade in a little late, which can cause a crash.



In the Pandora, you'll be able to check the records of your past missions.

This isn't the only flaw in *Crimzon Skies*. Sadly, bugs abound. On three different computers, the game would stutter every time I flew close to a large object. Usually, this can be overlooked, but a few missions require flying through large obstacles. The result is a series of crashes that are in no way the fault of the pilot. Another problem is the wingman AI. There were more than a few incidents where I'd finish a mission only to have my wingman crash right into me at the end. The biggest and worst bug is one that will erase your saved campaign if you play a multiplayer match (thankfully, Microsoft has released a patch that fixes this problem).

In a stroke of genius, Zipper Interactive has included an option to skip missions. Much like in *Freespace 2*, if you fail a single mission over and over again, an option will come up for you to skip it. This will be very handy for people who get stuck because of problems with the engine, or if they hit a wall with an especially difficult level (such as any of the stunt flying missions).

When all the pirates have been shot down, all the lawmen have been put in their place, and fame has finally been secured, *Crimzon Skies* delivers a very enjoyable and fulfilling experience. Sadly, the bugs prevent me from giving this game an Editors' Choice award in good conscience. I would gladly have waited another month for a polished product and given it a 90 percent or higher.

— Li C. Kuo



Why are the Russians always the bad guys?

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Terrific style, character, and gameplay; the most fun I've had with my joystick in a long time.

LOWS: Bugs; graphics engine could really use some smoothing out.

BOTTOM LINE: A great game that narrowly misses classic status due to its bugs.

PC GAMER
EXCELLENT

85%
EXCELLENT

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In light of Lara's recent disappearance, those closest to her gather together at the Croft Estate on a gray, rainy day for a memorial service in her honor. Afterwards, the friends sit quietly together in the study of the Croft Mansion and provide new insights about Lara's past exploits that have until now remained a secret...



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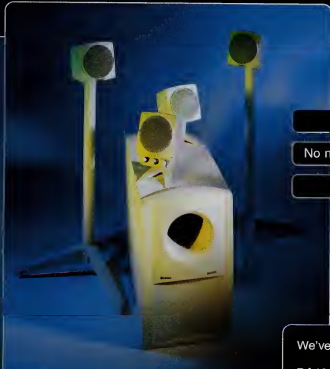


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CATEGORY Strategy	REQUIRED P3 233, 32MB RAM, 20MB hard-disk space, 4MB CD30 accelerator card
DEVELOPER SSI	WE RECOMMEND P3 300, 64MB RAM
PUBLISHER Mattel Interactive	MAXIMUM PLAYERS 4

Panzer General III

Scorched Earth

These Panzers are finally played-out — this latest entry to the series doesn't live up to its predecessors.

When I first raved about the original *Panzer General* in these pages back in 1994, a number of grognard readers thought I'd lost my mind.

"Was Colonel Trotter on Prozac when he wrote that review?" queried one. No — I was really quite taken by the game's fast pace, easy mechanics, and tail-wagging friendliness. I thought it was a great entry-level wargame and was not at all surprised when it became a roaring crossover hit. I've stayed faithful to the game throughout its many subsequent iterations, and I still believe it's a good choice for new or casual wargamers.

But I simply can't muster any enthusiasm for *Panzer General III: Scorched Earth*. Five or six battles into my first campaign, I was seized with ennui. I dutifully played on (this being my job and all), but I did so with tight-lipped determination rather than any real sense of fun.

This is basically the same game as *Panzer General 3D: Assault*, except that it takes place on the Russian Front rather than in North Africa and Europe. You get to see lots of fog and snow instead of sand. Big deal. The touted "improvements" consist mainly of new units, an expanded Battle



Generator, and what Mattel describes as "four new exciting campaigns."

I'm sorry, but these are not "new" campaigns; they cover mostly the same battles that have already been gamed-to-death in *PG I and II*. I can't even guess at how many times I've captured Warsaw by now — 2D, 3D, hand-drawn or rendered, it's the same experience it was six years ago.

Scorched Earth uses the same three-tiered system of "stars," "slots," and "promotions" that debuted in its predecessor. Each leader can perform X number of actions per turn (with "X" being equal to that leader's number of stars); success brings promotion (more stars), and between battles you can rotate veteran leaders back into the officer pool to give unbloated ones a chance to win their spurs. As both leaders and units acquire veteran status, they receive tactical bonuses that bestow special one-time advantages in each scenario.

Alas, one irritating feature remains unchanged: to really kick butt in a campaign, you need to win "Major" victories

(beaucoup points, bonuses, promotions, and prototypes). But doing so requires you to take all your objectives within a specified number of turns — and the odds are rigged against you. Over and over again, you'll be one turn or one unit short when the time limit runs out. It's criminally frustrating.

Frankly, I've run out of patience with this gimmick. If I take all my objectives in 10 turns instead of nine, and destroy 21 enemy units for the loss of two of my own, then by god, I have achieved a "major" victory. But no: the game only awards a puny "minor" victory and hands out a parsimonious ration of bonus points.

Newcomers to wargaming will still have fun with this game, but for everyone else... well, as the rustics say in my part of the South: "This dog don't hunt no more."

— William R. Trotter



Here's the Headquarters screen, where you promote worthy officers or trade up your current hardware for better equipment.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Pretty graphics; excellent Battle Generator; easy learning curve for the newbies.

LOWS: There's nothing new, fresh, or exciting in the whole game.

BOTTOM LINE: This series is suffering from terminal weilschmerz; time to put this warhorse out to pasture.

PC GAMER **65%**
ABOVE AVERAGE

CATEGORY Action	REQUIRED PU 230, 32MB RAM, 20MB hard-drive space, 3D accelerator card
DEVELOPER Angel Studios	WE RECOMMEND PU 540, 64MB RAM, 40MB hard-drive space, wheel
PUBLISHER Microsoft	MAXIMUM PLAYERS 1

Midtown Madness 2

Turn signals? Auto insurance? Who needs 'em? We'd rather fly down the streets of San Francisco and London.

Anyone who played the original *Midtown Madness* could probably sense, instinctively, that the game should have been set in either San Francisco or London. Thankfully, *Midtown Madness 2* takes you to both locales for the continued adventures of a hell-bent driver (yourself) unleashed on the streets of authentically rendered cities.

Both metro areas are ideal choices — one allows for ridiculously long jumps through colorful neighborhoods, while the other has that wacky we-drive-on-the-left-through-the-roundabout sensibility. Both cities are enormous, with plenty of landmarks and shortcuts that keep the exploring from ever growing dull.

Less obvious perks to the sequel are the addition of several new cars and paintjobs (with more to be unlocked), as well as a great new driving mode. The crash course training mode puts you into the role of either a fledgling stunt driver in San Francisco or a rookie cabbie in London. The stunt driving is great fun; you pull 180s, peel away from cops, or try to ram another car into submission. The challenges of being a cabbie are to figure out the labyrinthine London surface streets (doing "the knowledge") and also how to take tight corners in car that handles like a Sherman tank. I recommend a gamepad



Now's your chance to tour the Tube in style as you make your way around the streets of London.

over the keyboard, and, if you've got it, a steering wheel over a gamepad.

The other modes include the familiar cruise, blitz, checkpoint, and circuit races. Because none of the waypoints in the blitz or checkpoint mode have to be completed in order, the cruise mode is ideal for exploring either city, getting a feel for the shortcuts without having to worry about the pressures of the clock (although cops will constantly hound you). The circuit race is the much more traditional racing event, but Angel Studios has done a fine job coming up with some creative and varied tracks.

Finally, the multiplayer mode includes the super-fun "cops and robbers" game. You

take on the role of a patrolman or a bank robber trying to return a gold bar to either a bank (its rightful place) or a hideout (crime does indeed pay). You can make other players drop the bar by ramming into them. And since the gold appears at a random place on the map after each successful return, you often have several cars converging on a single street corner at high speeds from different directions. The result is a sweet symphony of destruction.

Unfortunately, the game's shine is marred by some annoying technical glitches. The braking system has some problems — it seems impossible to lock the wheels with the foot brake, thus forcing you to use the hand brake almost exclusively. After a wreck or a rollover, the computer would often reset the car facing the opposite direction. I also experienced the occasional lockup. Since little has been done to spice up the game visually from the original, I was disappointed by the sluggish framerate in San Francisco even on a PIII with a Voodoo3 at 800x600.

Nonetheless, despite these imperfections and a few weird omissions (where's the replay mode?), *Midtown Madness 2* is the sort of reckless fun for those of us who don't like our driving games wreck-less. My lifelong fantasy of tearing down Russian Hill like Steve McQueen in *Bullitt* has been realized.

— Jim Preston



There's no better way to explore San Francisco than with a police escort.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Huge, detailed cities; lots of cars to unlock; fun multiplayer modes.

LOWS: Occasional bugs; some awkward controls; nothing new visually; some strange omissions.

BOTTOM LINE: It's not a vast improvement over the original, but it's just as fun.

PC GAMER
EXCELLENT

81%

CATEGORY	Racing	REQUIRED	PII 233, 22MB RAM, 120MB hard-drive space, 8MB 3D card
DEVELOPER	Smash Games	WE RECOMMEND	None! <i>Need For Speed: Porsche Unleashed</i>
PUBLISHER	SouthPeak Interactive	MAXIMUM PLAYERS	1

Dukes of Hazzard Racing for Home

Despite horrendous "acting" and threadbare plots, "The Dukes of Hazzard" TV show had two major attractions that kept you coming back for more: Daisy Duke (duht), and lots and lots of car-chase scenes (the hallmark of most "action" television shows of the era).

Dukes of Hazzard: Racing for Home is nothing more than a budget title that spent most of its dough on licensing fees, and will likely only appeal to the kind of nostalgic well-wishers who actually tuned in for the *Dukes of Hazzard* reunion movie.

And you'll need to be a Dukes fanatic to stomach the game long enough to get any enjoyment out of it. The graphics aren't even on par with EA's original *Need for Speed*, and the gameplay is extremely frustrating. If Bo and Luke Duke had to contend with such twitchy controls and unpredictable physics, Roscoe and Enos would have caught 'em in the very first episode of the show.

Racing for Home is more of a smash-up derby than a racing game. Most missions require you to get from Point A to Point B within a certain time limit while you get repeatedly rammed by Roscoe, Enos, and a mysterious "bad guy" that has it in for the Duke boys. Make it to Point B in time, and you win — it doesn't matter if your opponents are still right with you, either. There are a number of power-ups lying around Hazzard County — nitro boost, repair kit, arrows, oil, etc. — and you better search them out, as some missions are near impossible to beat without them.

Frighteningly, the game's biggest strength is its story, which is a pretty good representation of what you'd find in a typical episode of the TV series. Uncle Jesse's farm is once more in jeopardy, the Duke boys are fingered by Boss Hogg for a crime they didn't commit, and some dude's trying to exact revenge on the Dukes for some unknown grievance. Yes, the Dukes always need to get somewhere in a hurry — be it the bank to file the month's mortgage payment, the fair-



Yee-haw! If you've always wanted to smash-up the General Lee, this game's for you.

grounds to qualify for a race, or the junkyard to pick up parts for the General Lee. And wherever they go, you can bet that Roscoe and Enos won't be far behind.

Each mission is preceded by a short rendered video clip that is narrated by none other than Waylon Jennings himself (the Balladeer from the show). Other original cast members lend their voice "talents" including Tom Wopat (Luke Duke), James Best (Sheriff Roscoe P. Coltrane), Sonny Shroyer (Enos Strate), and Ben Jones (Cooter).

If you're absolutely hankerin' for a return to Hazzard County, *Racing For Home* might bring you a few hours pleasure. Our recommendation: just seek out the re-runs on cable. There are far better racing games out there for the PC, and Daisy Duke is rendered too badly to provide more than a grossed-out scowl.

— Steve Klatt

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Driving the General Lee; story true to the show; great show opening.

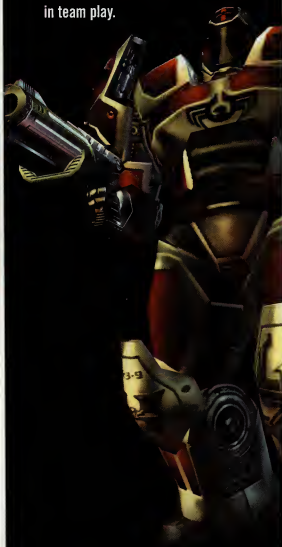
LOWES: Twitchy controls; lackluster graphics; terribly rendered character cinematics.

BOTTOM LINE: Save your \$30 for a bottle of 'shine and some chaw.

PC GAMER 45%
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CATEGORY Simulation	REQUIRED P2M, 50MB RAM, 20MB hard-drive space
DEVELOPER eSim Games	WE RECOMMEND PW 450, 64MB RAM
PUBLISHER Shrapnel Games	MAXIMUM PLAYERS 12

Steel Beasts



Let's not mince words: this is the best tank sim on the market. Heck, it may be the best tank sim ever.

There has been much gnashing of teeth over the fact that the big companies are abandoning the hardcore sim market. If nothing else, the very existence of *Steel Beasts* — to say nothing of its amazing quality — proves that a small indie company can turn out a simulation worthy to rank with MicroProse's best.

In this case, we're talking about a very small company, eSim Games is essentially a one-man operation. Al Delaney spent two years coding *Steel Beasts*, then had it exhaustively tested by real-life tankers. Shrapnel Games welcomed it with open arms, gave it a final commercial polish, and sent it forth to amaze the fraternity of turret-heads and silence the skeptics.

Okay, sure, there are some limitations that wouldn't exist if it were the product of a massive design/graphics team. Let's get them out of the way now, for benefit of the readers who might consider them important: *Steel Beasts* is not 3D-accelerated; it supports only 640x480 resolution; it has no campaign mode; no air power is simulated; and you have to buy it online from

Shrapnel Games (www.shrapnelgames.com).

As far as I'm concerned, though, when viewed against its enormous and generous virtues, none of these things amount to a wet rat.

By focusing on just two main battle tanks (the M1A1 Abrams and the German Leopard, which has never been simmed before), *Steel Beasts* serves up an awesome amount of gritty, realistic detail, down to the subtlest distinctions between the two tanks' fire control systems (example: the Abrams' laser burns out if overused, while the Leopard's automatically shuts down until it's cooled off enough to restart).

The 2D graphics are great, and the absence of finicky 3D driver conflicts contributes to the game's rock-solid stability, even in multiplayer modes. I love the varied and exciting explosion, damage, and missile effects. And you can really feel the rush when you hose down an APC with your .50 and observe the tracers winking and ricocheting off the hull. Ditto for the sound effects, which were recorded in real tanks and range from ear-splittingly loud to extremely subtle.

Forty-five missions are included, and the lack of campaigns is made up for by a



The Leopard is a most impressive tank — but then, the Germans have had lots of, um, experience in the realm of tank design.

powerful and feature-packed editor. This game will have long Internet legs, as custom-made scenarios multiply like rabbits. Some missions involve lots of attached armor and infantry, along with artillery assets. They can be complicated, to be sure, but there are 40 graduated tutorials and a well-illustrated manual to help you ease into command.

Mission planning is simplified by a brilliantly logical line-of-sight overlay that shows you where your tank would be fully exposed, where its turret alone would be visible, and where it would be 100 percent unobservable. And if you really get "tank fever," the program generously includes a complete 430-page field manual from an actual U.S. Army armored unit.

Multiplayer simply rocks. Two human forces can go at it, or one human force can fight against an AI enemy, and two players can control the same tank in cooperative mode (one as the commander, the other as the gunner).

Steel Beasts looks, feels, and certainly sounds like the real thing. You will not find a better tank simulation on the market.

— William R. Trotter

Sure, the graphics are only 2D, but they're very good 2D!



FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Fantastic degree of realism; including numerous features never attempted before.

LOWS: Dated graphics engine; no campaign mode; no air power simulated.

BOTTOM LINE: This is the best tank simulation you can buy, and maybe the best one ever.

PC GAMER 90%
EDITORS' CHOICE

CATEGORY: Strategy	RECOMMEND: FOR: 6MB RAM, 1GB+ hard disk space
DEVELOPER: SSG	WE RECOMMEND: PC 3Dc, cable modem for Internet play
PUBLISHER: SSI	MAXIMUM PLAYERS: 4

Reach for the Stars

Some wargame developers believe that great AI is what makes your game; attention to style and atmosphere are the second consideration. SSG seems to be one of these groups. *Reach for the Stars* meets all the expectations you'd have of a top-notch space strategy game — except for that extra dose of imagination and variety that separates addictions from casual use.

The "4X" space genre (eXpand, eXploit, eXplore, eXterminate) has been getting a workout lately, with the real-time *Imperium Galactica II* issued earlier this year and three similar titles in the hopper. *Reach for the Stars* is a turn-based grand strategy game in which you build mighty fleets to colonize nearby planets; after encountering new civilizations, you then get to meet, ally with, and make war against alien cultures.

The interface appears complicated at first glance, with its attempt at "futuristic space panel" controls. But it's easy to use once you dive in. Icons are well-chosen, and there are tons of Tool Tips help tabs. The first three chapters of the Stars campaign provide an excellent, detailed tutorial (there are also 21 scenarios for standalone or multiplayer use, and a random scenario generator).

Planetary production is limited to six generic structures (industry, defense, etc.). Research trees are extensive and customized for each race, but are strictly combat-related. Some people will enjoy this, and it makes for a stronger opponent AI by simplifying the computer's options, but it also puts tight limits on the kind of game you can play. By contrast, configuration options are greater than any other 4X space game I've seen, allowing you to define not merely the AI strength, economy, and civilization level of your opponents, but even their respective research trees.

In space combat, you can apply one of four different battle formations and three engagement ranges, though there's no maneuvering. Without the maneuvers, you feel a little bit like a spectator just when your strategic moves are getting juicy. Those of us who look forward to the healthy afterglow that follows a systematic, bone-crushing defeat of one's primary rival might feel a little undervalued. This feeling only increases when you discover that, like *Master of Orion II*, *Reach for the Stars* merely summarizes ground combat results.

Differences between the game's 16 predefined races run the gamut of growth rate,



Described as "floating, gas-filled jellyfish," only the Meridi would design a missile that looks like broccoli.

bellicosity, environmental tolerances, and the like. But at no time in the standalone game do you feel as though you're dealing with an alien opponent rather than a computerized AI, because SSG never lets you see or hear any "alien" images, music, fonts, voices, or written dialogue. Diplomacy is handled as in *Warlords III*: abstract menu icons represent war/neutralty/peace offers, bribes, and embargoes. It's a space wargame with absolutely no exotic alien encounters.

Multiplayer *Reach for the Stars* supports up to four players via local network, Internet connection (TCP/IP), or MPlayer. While the campaign is unavailable in multiplayer mode, you can still choose any of the pre-designed scenarios, or roll your own with the very handy scenario editor.

Overall, I prefer multiplayer *Imperium Galactica II* for its far greater breadth of features (which include spy activities, 3D interactive combat, and increased diplomatic options). However, *Reach for the Stars* offers dazzling computer AI in single-player mode, and comes with a great scenario editor. For a first-rate standalone challenge, *Reach for the Stars* is worth a hardcore space-strategy fan's money.

— Barry Brenesal

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Great AI; unlimited replayability; excellent configuration options; strong scenario editor.

LOWS: Lack of atmosphere; unimpressive 2D graphics; non-interactive combat.

BOTTOM LINE: The game balance makes this a worthwhile space game, though nothing special.

PC GAMER 69%
ABOVE AVERAGE

Clean Cut

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STRATEGY DEVELOPER



CATEGORY Racing	REQUIRED P233, 2GB RAM, 100MB hard-drive space, IBM DD accelerator card
DEVELOPER Digital Illusion	WE RECOMMEND PX 300, 64MB RAM, 16MB DD accelerator card
PUBLISHER Infogrames	MAXIMUM PLAYERS 1

Rally Masters Michelin Race of Champions

Our friends from across the pond deliver a racing game that American NASCAR fans can get into.

Although wildly popular in Europe, rallying probably ranks somewhere between water polo and women's softball in the minds of most North American sports fans.

This probably explains why most major PC rallying titles — such as Codemaster's *Colin McRae Rally* and EA's *Mobil 1 Rally Championship* — are released to the European market several months before U.S. buyers can get their mitts on them. Luckily, Infogrames' *Rally Masters* seems to be far more suited to North American racing tastes.

Based on an annual FIA-sanctioned competition, the Michelin Race of Champions is a unique end-of-season event where the world's top rally drivers compete head-to-head in IRC-style knockout races on parallel figure-eight circuits. NASCAR-bred American racing fans are probably far more likely to embrace this inventive one-on-one racing style than the prospect of a solo run through some desolate back-country roads.

Infogrames and Swedish developer Digital Illusion have also thoughtfully included a full complement of traditional point-to-point stages for fans of classic rallying, as well as a healthy collection of closed-loop circuits for the bash 'em-smash 'em crowd. All told, there are 45 individual tracks included with *Rally Masters*, which is a damn fine score for any racing game.

Thirty real-world drivers and 22 rally machines — including licensed models from Toyota, Ford, Peugeot, Renault, Mitsubishi,



This elaborate stadium course demonstrates how Americans might construct a *Rally Masters* circuit.



Dust, flame, and damage effects are all graphically represented. This Lancer has just used up its windshield deductible.

Skoda, Audi, Citroën, Hyundai, and Lancia — have also been shoehorned into the game, and each car exhibits its own unique handling and performance characteristics. Digital Illusion has created a highly convincing yet thoroughly entertaining driving model for *Rally Masters* that's challenging yet accessible to all racers. The cars power-slide through the turns with aplomb on the game's constantly changing road surfaces and a deft touch with the steering wheel, brakes, and throttle is quite critical to maintaining proper control.

The only quibbles I have with the overall driving environment is the game's somewhat minimalist garage menu and almost non-existent damage modeling. Only the most cursory of adjustments can be made to your car's setup, and although damage is represented graphically, there's no discernible degradation in performance after you've "re-modeled" your Peugeot or Toyota against a few trees or rocks. The races themselves tend to be extremely short affairs that rarely last for more than a few minutes. These caveats aside, however, Infogrames still deserves full marks for delivering one of the most engaging driving experiences you're likely to find on a current-generation PC racer.

Graphically, *Rally Masters* is a somewhat middle of the road affair. The scenery and 3D modeling aren't as drop-dead gorgeous as EA's *Mobil 1 Rally Championship* but

they certainly hold their own against older titles like *Colin McRae Rally*. The circuit backdrops are lush and feature full weather, dust, and nighttime enhancements, but some of the accompanying 2D and 3D objects (such as the sprite-based spectators and the individual vehicle cockpits) exhibit a distinct coarseness as a result of some low poly counts. The stellar audio effects and first-rate replay screen do manage to earn it back some brownie points, however.

If virtual rallying on your PC has never quite done it for you in the past, then you really owe it to yourself to pick up *Rally Masters*. Whether you elect to pursue the game's head-to-head Race of Champions format, multi-car trophy races, traditional rally events, or IPX-TCP/IP multiplayer competition, there's enough serious gameplay depth here to keep you going for months.

— Andy Mahood

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Highly entertaining driving physics; tons of licensed cars and drivers; more than 45 tracks.

LOWS: Coarse graphic elements; weak damage modeling; minimalist setup menu; short races.

BOTTOM LINE: Thoroughly enjoyable "IRC-style" rallying game.

PC GAMER
GOOD

78%

CATEGORIES	Parody/Trivia	REQUIRED	P133, 16MB RAM, ROMs hard-disk space
DEVELOPER	Hyperion	WE RECOMMEND	Buying a different game
PUBLISHER	Simon & Schuster Inc.	MAXIMUM PLAYERS	4

Who Wants to Beat Up a Millionaire?

I've always been under the impression that parody games were supposed to be humorous. Following the legacy of *Panty Raider*, Simon & Schuster has proven me wrong again with their surprisingly unfunny and pointless title, *Who Wants to Beat Up a Millionaire?*

The actual gameplay of *Millionaire* is typical of computer trivia games. What's the "twist"? Instead of picking up some dough with every question answered, you get a chance to "beat up" a millionaire into a bloody pulp. With every beating he takes, he loses a little bit of cash. If you manage to bring him to bankruptcy without missing a question, you win. The beatings themselves are fairly unexciting; he stands there and you punch him with a few strokes of the arrow keys. The more successful punches you plant, the more money he loses. That's it.

With 750 questions, it has more content than many trivia games. However, since it's a parody game, I expected questions that differ from the norm; unfortunately, they sound like they were pulled directly out of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* or *Trivial Pursuit*.

The character animations throughout the game consist of a minimal number of



You'd think that the chance to clock a millionaire would be a lot more fun than this awful parody.

frames and are consistently jerky. The cartoon drawings of the millionaires themselves are over simplistic, leaving much to be desired. The sound also has problems; there are many occasions where the host's voice skips while reading a question. Trivia games should have some sensory appeal in order to be worth playing. *Millionaire* failed to meet this minimum standard.

Even at \$20, you'd be better off spending your money on something else in the bargain bin. Hell, this title barely even cuts it as a free Shockwave game on the 'net. If you want a humorous and entertaining trivia game that really manages to stick it to Regis Philbin, pick up a copy of *You Don't Know Jack*. Personally, I'll be waiting patiently for *Who Wants to Beat Up a Simon & Schuster Executive*.

— Steve Droytchov

MILLIONAIRES WE'D LIKE TO BEAT UP



Eminem "I'm not really a homicidal, homophobic misogynist...I just rap about it." Do the words "Vanilla Ice" mean anything to you?



Richard Hatch We vowed we'd never talk about "Survivor," but you can't really blame us [just this one time, can you?]



Leonardo DiCaprio Italian for "Jeremy Williams." Aside from the looks, girls, money, and fame, the similarities are downright eerie.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Potential for a millisecond's humor value when you look at the box.

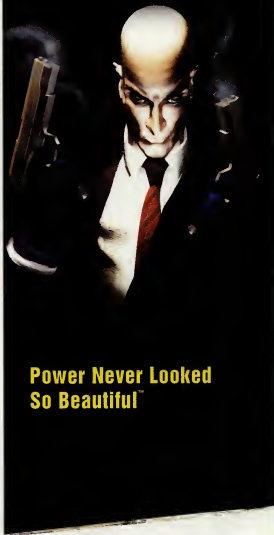
LOWS: Everything thereafter, including laborious one-joke humor and sub-mediocre graphics.

BOTTOM LINE: We'd pay 20 bucks for a good gag game, but this one ain't worth a single dollar.

PC GAMER 15%
DON'T BOTHER

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Superbike 2001

EA's latest lets you taste the thrill of victory and the agony of kissing the pavement going more than 100mph.

No sport captures the reckless, foolhardy, and ultimately suicidal human spirit better than superbike racing. Think about it: automobiles courteously feature seat belts, rollcoages, and airbags to protect your squishy and easily mauled body from the elements. But motorcycles? Strap on a helmet and pray your bones knit quickly, 'cause a crash is going to spell more pain than falling into a meat grinder.

EA's last offering in the oh-so-dangerous motorcycle racing genre, *Superbike 2000*, was a more than respectable game — and while *Superbike 2001* follows EA's universally detested same-engine-with-minor-upgrades path, there's no denying the fact that it's a damn fine upgrade.

The game is beginner-friendly, with useful tutorials and lots of HUD-type aids. Handy features in the settings menu include a myriad of braking options (including an auto-brake for cheaters), rider assistance, and automatic weight shifting (leave this off if you want to experiment with mad wheelies).

Once you get a handle on the controls, you'll find yourself having a good deal of fun. Steering wheels, gamepads, and even keyboards performed surprisingly well, though you may have to do some dead-zone tweaking. The Championship Mode tosses you through a killer 13-week tour, with opportunity for qualification and practice before each race. There are also liberal amounts of replay value, with bikes from seven companies, more than a dozen tracks, and more than enough real-life riders to go around.

And if you've got a ninja-powered system (my Athlon 800 with a Voodoo5 had problems maintaining a 60fps frame rate), *Superbike 2001* will push it to the limit with the draw distance on the tracks almost unlimited. The riders animate well (especially after crashes), and rain shows realistic, distorted reflections in the wet pavement.

In the past, many superbike games have been completely devoid of crashes of the physical type, since motorcycle manufacturers don't like seeing their best vehicles getting banged up. Wussies. Fortunately, multi-bike pileups are delightfully portrayed in *Superbike 2001*, with awe-inspiring numbers of airborne bodies and vehicles tumbling end-over-end. Here's a neat little mini-game: see how many of your 23 opponents you can wipe out on the first turn of Laguna Seca in rainy weather, then fire up replay mode and watch the carnage from multiple angles. This is so much fun it's nearly criminal.

CATEGORY Race	REQUIRED P200, 32MB RAM, 360MB hard-drive space, CD3D accelerator card
DEVELOPER Electronic Arts	WE RECOMMEND PIII 500, 64MB RAM, Voodoo5 or GeForce2 card
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts	MAXIMUM PLAYERS 2



Switch to the first-person mode for the ultimate in realism — and uncontrollable terror.



Driving to the front of the pack and popping a wheelie in the middle of a rainstorm is a bad idea.

Unfortunately, this repeated mayhem showed off a few flaws in the AI. Bikes will occasionally intersect with each other, and follow each other in a flawless, chain-like fashion. There's also an irritating bug where your rider will get stuck in a wall after a collision, and run in place until you restart the race or quit. This is absolutely unacceptable, and you'll see plenty of other collision quirks when recovering from a crash. Also seriously lacking is the online component. Internet play requires you to know your opponent's IP address, and there's no built-in server browser or player-matching service. If you're desperate, though, you can always make do with a console-style split-screen mode (better hope you've got two controllers).

Overall, *Superbikes 2001* is good stuff. It plays great, looks sensational, and should be any motorcycle fan's dream come true — but with a few more tweaks, it could have been instant classic material. Not until *Superbike 2002*, I suppose.

— Colin Williamson

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Decent controls; more than enough tracks; brilliant pileups; good animation.

LOWS: Some odd collision-related bugs; crap online play; oddly reminiscent of last year's version.

BOTTOM LINE: If you're into this stuff, there's no need to look elsewhere.

PC GAMER **83%**
EXCELLENT

The engine can crank up to twenty-times superbikes on screen, but with your CPU handle it? Most systems may need apply.





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Babbage's

software **ETC**

HO HO HEE HEE HA HA HO HO HEE HEE

(Warning: These Gifts May Cause Recipient



The Sims: Livin' Large
by EA Games

The Sims expansion pack gives you even more power to create and control the lives of your Sims. You have new career options and entirely fresh gameplay elements, from roach infestations to alien abductions. It's up to you to decide whether your home is a gloomy castle or a love shack, if the breadwinner is a hacker or a slacker.



Age of Empires II: The Conquerors
by Microsoft

Age of Empires II: The Conquerors Expansion Pack is the official add-on to the award-winning, best-selling real-time strategy game Age of Empires II: The Age of Kings. Focusing on legendary leaders, The Conquerors will challenge veterans and novices alike.



Diablo II
by Havas/Blizzard

In **Diablo II**, players return to a world of dark gothic fantasy. As one of five distinct character types, players will explore the world of **Diablo II**, journey across distant lands, fight new villains, discover new treasures and uncover ancient mysteries. Five all-new character classes with unique attributes and abilities.



PC 4 Point Speakers
by Creative Labs

Experience the new standard for

multi-channel audio with a four-speaker surround system. With four compact amplified satellite speakers, separate subwoofer, two rear stands and the single master volume control, **PCWorks FourPointSurround FPS1000** is the first complete four-channel speaker system for the PC.



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HA HA HO HO HEE HEE HA HA HO HO

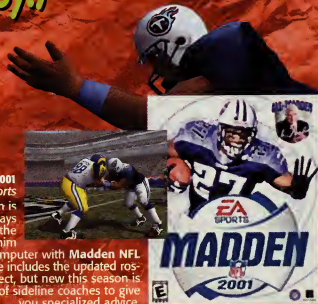
To Become (razed with Joy.)

CRIMSON SKIES



Crimson Skies by Microsoft

Enter a classic Hollywood adventure movie-world of dastardly villains, beautiful air-privates, and valiant militia forces as you battle for control of the skies of North America and the aerial universe of **Crimson Skies!**



Madden NFL 2001
by EA Sports
John Madden is back and as always he's brought the entire NFL with him

into your computer with **Madden NFL 2001**. The game includes the updated rosters you'd expect, but new this season is the addition of sideline coaches to give you specialized advice.

Homeworld: Cataclysm by Havas

Homeworld: Cataclysm, the next episode in the Homeworld universe, begins roughly 15 years after the events of the original game. Lead your fleet through 17 single player missions as you struggle for position in the emerging order – and face the might of a mysterious and powerful new foe.



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Technology

Voodoo
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Voodoo5 5500 AGP

Voodoo5 5500 AGP 64mb Video Card by 3dfx

The **Voodoo5 5500 AGP** from 3dfx is the next stage in the evolution of ultra-high resolution gaming. Utilizing a revolutionary scalable architecture, the **Voodoo5 5500 AGP** features dual 3dfx VSA-100 chips for more 3D horsepower.

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Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn
by Interplay

Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn is a mythic saga continuing the much-loved Baldur's Gate storyline. The Forgotten Realms adventure ensues along the southern portion of the Sword Coast in the merchant kingdom known as Amn.



RollerCoaster TYCOON



RollerCoaster Tycoon: Loopy Landscapes
by Hasbro/Micro Prose

RollerCoaster Tycoon Expansion Pack: Loopy Landscapes is a double expansion pack that also includes the first expansion pack, Corkscrew Follies. Loopy Landscapes features all-new attractions and new park shops, such as T-shirt stands, donut stands, and a coffee café.



Deus Ex
by Eidos

This is a world of lies and betrayal, a world where nothing is as it seems. To succeed, you must travel the globe in a quest for knowledge, develop your character's strengths as you see fit, build a network of allies to assist you, and determine when stealth and strategy are more important than action.



Roundhouse 24 CD Storage
by Roundhouse

This Roundhouse 24 CD Storage Wallet holds up to 24 CD's or 12 CD's, with booklets and includes "BubbleSleeves", the worlds safest CD sleeves.

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AND TATTOOING ON ONE'S FACE! (Now That'll Get Their Attention.)



Metal Gear Solid v1.0 by Microsoft

You are Snake, a government agent on a mission to regain control of a secret nuclear weapons base from terrorists' hands. Lightly armed and facing an army of foes, Snake must avoid fire-fights in order to stay alive. Will you accept the mission?



Star Trek: Voyager Elite Force by Activision

Star Trek: Voyager Elite Force pits players against a multitude of Star Trek enemies, including the relentless Borg and never-before-seen aliens, in intense single-player and multi-player combat missions.



Everquest: Scars of Velious by Verant/989 Studios

You may be one of the first to explore this forbidding icy land. Your feet may be the first tread its deadly caverns and ancient shrines. If you are among the stout of heart, you may dare to enter The Scars of Velious.

Everquest: Ruins of Kunark by Verant/989 Studios

Welcome to the largest online 3D fantasy world ever created. EverQuest: The Ruins of Kunark takes players to the continent of Kunark. Players will face all new experiences in a totally new environment.



Get one free figure with the pre-purchase of EVERQUEST: SCARS OF VELIOUS while supplies last.

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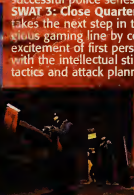
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SWAT 3: Close Quarters Battle by Havas/Sierra Studios

It's time for another installment in the most successful police series of all time. SWAT 3: Close Quarters Battle takes the next step in this prestigious gaming line by combining the excitement of first person action with the intellectual stimulation of tactics and attack planning.



Wizards and Warriors by Activision

An evil Pharaoh has overcome a curse and returned to a world unable to

defend itself against him. Only the legendary Mavin Sword – a blade forged of twin metals, one cursed by evil, the other blessed by the divine – has the strength to bring his defeat.



Midtown Madness 2
by Microsoft
Midtown Madness 2 delivers even more, mad-cap racing excitement with all the wild and hair-raising racing challenges you've come

to expect! Midtown Madness 2 features two all new locations (London & San Francisco) and nine hip new urban roadsters!



Cyber Gel Blue Mouse Mat by American

Feel the difference with this blue Ultimate Cyber Gel Mouse Mat. This mouse mat is specifically designed to create a comfortable work space and ease the strains of prolonged computer use, along with providing the ultimate in comfort and feel.



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Command And Conquer: Red Alert 2 by Electronic Arts/Westwood Studios

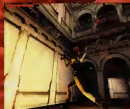
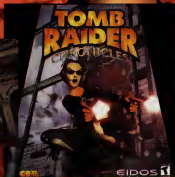
Dark experiments have permanently altered time. Or have they? Now, Soviet tanks crush city after city while Allied cruisers shell bases. Spies lurk, land-mines wait, and strange new technologies aid both sides in their struggle for ultimate control.



Tomb Raider Chronicles by Eidos

Chronicles follows Lara's supposed death, focusing on the friends

and allies who fondly remember her via flashbacks. Familiar non-player characters such as Jean-Paul and Pierre reminisce about Lara, each memory turning into one of four levels that take place in the past and include all new locations. Players will get the chance to see and play Lara in all new costumes, handle new weapons, and face new enemies.



Combat Flight Simulator II by Microsoft

If the movie Top Gun was turned into a World War II era videogame, it would be called **Combat Flight Simulator II**. The action is fast and intense, and is not intended for those who suffer from simulator sickness or weak hearts.



Sidewinder Precision Pro USB by Microsoft

Microsoft's patented digital-optical joystick technology gives you the absolute control. It delivers continuously-correct calibration; no drift, non-moving optical parts, so you move through your game with laser-like precision.



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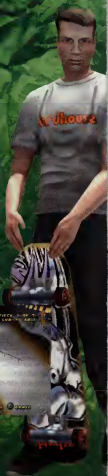
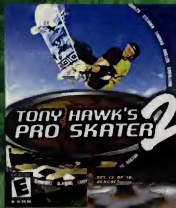


Shogun: Total War
by Electronic Arts

Enter the world of **Shogun: Total War**, the most ambitious, epic, and visually spectacular real-time strategy game ever created. Battle to the death for the ultimate honour: become Shogun, supreme dictator of all Japan.

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2
by Activision

Skate as legendary Tony Hawk or create a character from scratch and hit the course. The newest feature on **Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2** empowers you with the divine ability to customize a rider that looks anyway you want but skates like a pro.



American McGee's Alice
by Electronic Arts

Equipped with her courage, a keen appetite for the bizarre, and a lethal array of transmogrified toys, Alice returns to Wonderland. She'll need all her tools to penetrate enemy strongholds, confront the forces of evil, and put the wicked Queen of Hearts in her proper place.



Rainbow Six: Covert Operations
by Red Storm Entertainment/Ubi Soft

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Covert Operations Essentials is an extension of the popular **Rainbow Six** franchise, in which players will not only get to play new and exciting levels, but will also get an insider's look at the world of covert operations.



Babbage's

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Exactly what you want. (Is That Any way To Refer To your Father?)



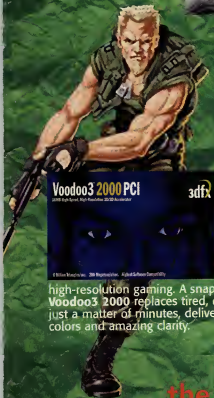
**Unreal Tournament:
Game Of The Year**
by Infogrames

Last year's FPS sensation is back. **Unreal Tournament Game of the Year Edition** is packed with three map packs, three new play modes and a ton of no-holds-barred gameplay.



Delta Force Land Warrior
by Electronic Arts/Novologic

You command the most advanced strike team ever assembled. You work in the shadows of your enemy's nightmares. To a terrorist, you are the executioner. To the rest of the world, you are **Delta Force: Land Warrior**.



Voodoo3 2000 PCI

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**Voodoo 3
2000 PCI**

by 3Dfx

From 3Dfx Interactive, the architect of the 3D revolution, comes a new dimension of

high-resolution gaming. A snap to install, the **Voodoo3 2000** replaces tired, old 2D cards in just a matter of minutes, delivering brilliant colors and amazing clarity.



Tribes 2
by Havas

Cunning tactics and exceptional teamwork are the keys to victory in **Tribes 2**, the next addition to the Tribes universe. Compete online via the Internet or over a Local Area Network (LAN) in challenging levels where players compete in squads to achieve the ultimate goal - victory.

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<input type="checkbox"/> Diablo 2	M	PC	A	<input type="checkbox"/> Homeworld Cataclysm
<input type="checkbox"/> Frogger 2	E	PC	A	<input type="checkbox"/> Incredible Machine Contraptions
<input type="checkbox"/> MS Age of Empires II Collector's Edition	RP	PC	CS	<input type="checkbox"/> Metal Gear Solid v1.0
<input type="checkbox"/> MS Combat Flight Simulator II	E	PC	CS	<input type="checkbox"/> Flight Simulator 2000 Pro
<input type="checkbox"/> MS Midtown Madness v2.0	E	PC	CS	<input type="checkbox"/> Motocross Madness v2.0
<input type="checkbox"/> RollerCoaster Tycoon: Loopy Landscapes	E	PC	CS	<input type="checkbox"/> The Sims
<input type="checkbox"/> The Sims, The Livin Large Expansion Pk	T	PC	A	<input type="checkbox"/> Sim Theme Park World
<input type="checkbox"/> Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2	E	PC	CS	<input type="checkbox"/> Madden NFL 2001
<input type="checkbox"/> PlayStation 2	E	System	CS	<input type="checkbox"/> Multi-tap and DVD Remote Control
<input type="checkbox"/> Gran Turismo 2000	E	PlayStation 2	CS	<input type="checkbox"/> PS2 Steering Wheel
<input type="checkbox"/> Tekken Tag Tournament	T	PlayStation 2	CS	<input type="checkbox"/> Official Strategy Guide
<input type="checkbox"/> PlayStation One	E	System	A	<input type="checkbox"/> Dual Shock Analog Controller
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<input type="checkbox"/> The Grinch	E	PlayStation	CS	<input type="checkbox"/> Memory Card
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<input type="checkbox"/> Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask	RP	Nintendo 64	CS	<input type="checkbox"/> Expansion Pak
<input type="checkbox"/> Bond: The World is not Enough	RP	N64 & PlayStation	CS	<input type="checkbox"/> Official Guide
<input type="checkbox"/> Madden NFL 2001	E	N64 & PlayStation	A	<input type="checkbox"/> Game Shark Pro

I currently own these systems:

- Personal Computer
 PlayStation 2
 PS ONE
 Sony PlayStation
- Dreamcast
 Nintendo 64
 Color Game Boy

- Game Boy
 3D Accelerator _____
 RAM _____
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DECEMBER 2000

HARD STUFF

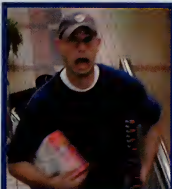
THE ULTIMATE MONTHLY GUIDE TO GAMING GEAR

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vederman

inside:

**Want a
Laptop
Dance?**





When Deadlines Attack!

Like taxes and death, deadlines here at PC Gamer magazine are inevitable. Every month the gang and I try to pretend that they are just a figment of our collective imaginations, but the truth is, deadlines are real — and they don't play nice, either.

This is the story of the weekend leading up to this month's Hard Stuff deadline. I had come in to finish up testing hardware over the weekend, but had been called away from the office late Saturday afternoon due to a family emergency. At the time, I wasn't too terribly worried about the section because I figured that I'd have all of Sunday to get done what was needed. But, as family emergencies are often wont to do when you've already procrastinated the month away — this one dragged on well into Sunday afternoon. By then, I needed to get some sleep. So, what did I do? I conked out at my place early in the evening, having every intention of working up at around 12 a.m. in the morning so that I could come into the office and get my section done before work the next day. But it was then that the dreaded snooze button monster attacked! And attack it did — every ten minutes from 12 a.m. all the way to 4 a.m.! So here I am — dedicated and kicking ass for you at 4:30 in the morning. Could I have saved myself a hassle-and-a-half had I just gotten my work done prior to the weekend? Of course! But then again, everyone knows that deadlines are just a figment of the imagination. (There's a lesson there, kids — Ed.)

Greg Vederman, Senior Associate Editor

HSREVIEWS

DELL LAPTOPS PAGE 188
Could a new laptop be on the horizon for you? Dell has three new models that are sure to please.

CREATIVE LABS ANNIHILATOR 2 GEFORCE ULTRA PAGE 190
It's finally here!

MICROSOFT FORCE FEED-BACK JOYSTICK PAGE 190
Microsoft has a new, inexpensive force feedback solution!



TURTLE BEACH SANTA CRUZ PAGE 199
They might not be using Aureal chips anymore, but that hasn't stopped Turtle Beach from making one hell of a sound card!

HSTECHQ&A

GREG ANSWERS A LETTER FROM THE HAMMY HABITAT AND ALSO ANSWERS SOME OF YOUR TECH QUESTIONS. PAGE 198



Want a Laptop Dance?

How We Rate the Hard Stuff
You've been around long enough to know the greatest technology doesn't mean a thing unless it improves the games you love to play. Our reviews focus on real-world feeling, but when a monitor is in order for comparison, we use the benchmarking tools developed by our brothers-owners sister publication Maximum PC. Between our testing and the Benchmark, you'll get the straight story.

HSTRINITY

Welcome to a BRAVE NEW WORLD

So you want to build a new PC, huh? As you may know, it can be a tricky affair. Luckily, Hard Stuff editor Greg Vederman is here to help you select the best parts for the job. The prices listed below reflect the lowest prices we could find as we went to press (obtained almost entirely from www.pricewatch.com).

ENTRY-LEVEL SYSTEM

PRICE: ROUGHLY \$559

CASE: 300 watt ATX form factor	..... \$100
PROCESSOR: Intel Celeron 600MHz	..... \$73
PCGA	..... \$83
MOTHERBOARD: Gigabyte GA-4VX7-4X	..... \$83
MEMORY: 128MB PC-133 SDRAM	..... \$70
CD-R/DVD-R/DW: Hi-Vel 6X Pioneer OVO-RDM drive w/software OVO decoding	..... \$115
FLOPPY DRIVE: Samsung 3.5" 1.44MB	..... \$8
HARD DRIVE: IBM Deskstar 750XP 15.2GB 7200RPM	..... \$97
SOUND CARD: Creative Labs SBLive! Value	..... \$36
MODEM: 3COM #5685 56k v.90	..... \$85
MONITOR: 17" OptiqueST 071	..... \$170
VIDEO CARD: 3fx Voodoo3 2000	..... \$83
JOYSTICK: Logitech WingMan Digital	..... \$17
GAMEPAD: Microsoft Sidewinder Gamepad	..... \$23
SPEAKERS: Labtech LCS-2414	..... \$26
KEYBOARD: Adronics	..... \$15
USB MDUSE: Logitech or Microsoft	..... \$39
TOTAL	..... \$1,058

MID-RANGE SYSTEM

PRICE: ROUGHLY \$1,100

CASE: 300 watt ATX form factor	..... \$100
PROCESSOR: AMD Athlon 760MHz	..... \$142
MOTHERBOARD: Asus K7V	..... \$112
MEMORY: 128MB PC-133 SDRAM	..... \$70
CD-R/DVD-R/DW: Creative Labs Encore SX w/6x Dvd3	..... \$188
FLOPPY DRIVE: Samsung 3.5" 1.44MB	..... \$8
HARD DRIVE: Maxtor 606H1H0EM 20.4GB 7200RPM	..... \$120
SOUND CARD: Creative Labs SBLive! MP3+	..... \$80
MODEM: 3COM #5685 56k v.90	..... \$85
MONITOR: 18" OptiqueST D95	..... \$289
VIDEO CARD: 32MB GeForce 256	..... \$117
JOYSTICK: Microsoft Sidewinder Precision Pro	..... \$53
GAMEPAD: Microsoft Sidewinder Gamepad	..... \$23
SPEAKERS: Cambridge SoundWorks FPS 1000	..... \$70
KEYBOARD: Adronics	..... \$15
USB MDUSE: Logitech or Microsoft	..... \$39
TOTALS	..... \$1,528

HIGH-END SYSTEM

PRICE: \$3,000 AND ABOVE

CASE: 300 watt ATX form factor	..... \$100
PROCESSOR: AMD Thunderbird 1.1GHz	..... \$715
MOTHERBOARD: Asus A7V	..... \$88
MEMORY: 256MB PC-133 SDRAM	..... \$206
CD-R/DVD-R/DW: Pioneer HOVD10AS-08R1 10X DVD-R/DW with MP2 cert.	..... \$258
FLOPPY DRIVE: Samsung 3.5" 1.44MB	..... \$8
HARD DRIVE: IBM Deskstar 750XB AT.06 7200RPM	..... \$468
SOUND CARD: Creative Labs SBLive! MP3+	..... \$83
MODEM: 3COM #5685 56k v.90	..... \$85
MONITOR: 18" OptiqueST Q95	..... \$299
VIDEO CARD: NVIDIA GeForce 2 Ultra	..... \$499
JOYSTICK: Saitek X38 Flight Control System (USB)	..... \$86
GAMEPAD: Microsoft Sidewinder Gamepad	..... \$23
SPEAKERS: Klipsch ProMedia 2-400	..... \$249
KEYBOARD: Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro	..... \$75
USB MOUSE: Original IntelliMouse with Intelli Eye technology	..... \$55
TOTALS	..... \$3,231



OVERCLOCKING USED TO BE A BUMMER



Be Safe. Do It With Afterburner.™

If you really must live on the edge, do it safely. The AOpen Afterburner Graphic Accelerator's unique Open BIOS lets you overclock to achieve radical performance without bombing-out your system! It's simple, safe and provides a level of control that no other graphic accelerator can offer. You might just say it releases the true heart and soul of the VGA card's capabilities. A passionate experience, to be sure. And naturally, the AOpen Afterburner features the nVIDIA GeForce Series chipset to let you maximize your total gaming experience. It also features a cool VGA-to-TV output and is compatible with most current mainboards on the market today.

So don't flirt with danger any longer. Stop by your nearest Micro Center store or visit microcenter.com for store locations and get your Afterburner video performance solution now! With Afterburner you may continue to live on the edge, but at least your mother would approve.

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■ DELL

Inspiron Laptops: 4000, 5000e, and 8000

Dell makes mean laptops, but are they good for games?

COMPANY

Dell
 (800) WWW-DELL
www.dell.com

PRICE

4000: \$2,918
 5000e: \$3,577
 8000: \$3,648

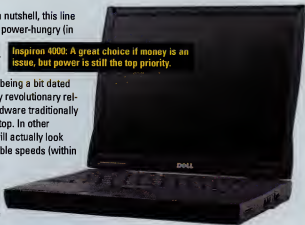
While all three of the laptops Dell sent us for review are Inspirons, each model is meant for a different type of user. The 4000, with its 14" display, light weight, limited graphics capabilities, and its ability to only house either the DVD-ROM drive or the floppy drive at the same time (one must be connected externally if both are needed) seems to be best suited for students or business people without need of 3D graphics, while the 5000e and 8000 are more geared to the power user — especially the 8000 since it offers the most powerful laptop-based graphics hardware currently in existence. Still, are any of them really suitable for gamers? Read on.

If anything has been holding laptops back from being the powerful game machines we've always wanted them to be, it's their weak-ass graphics cards. At a time when even the least expensive desktops are coming with halfway decent 3D accelerators, laptops have not been enjoying that same luxury; high performance, low power consumption graphics chips have simply been too hard to come by. Thankfully, things are changing. And remarkably, ATI has now updated its laptop technology for the new millennium with the

ATI Mobility 128 line. In a nutshell, this line of chips are slower, less power-hungry (in terms of the electricity needed to run them) versions of the Rage 128 — a technology that, while being a bit dated for desktop users, is truly revolutionary relative to the graphics hardware traditionally found in the average laptop. In other words, your 3D games will actually look good and run at acceptable speeds (within reason) when playing on a laptop that uses this hardware. And, as you've probably surmised by this point, all of Dell's new Inspirons come with this new graphics technology.

A good 3D card will add little to a laptop in and of itself if the rest of the hardware is less than stellar. When it comes to Dell, that's one thing you don't have to worry about; the parts used in these laptops are all of the highest quality — especially the screens. In terms of image quality and color saturation, it's nearly impossible to do better than the 15" SXGA+ TFT screen that's available on either the 5000e or the 8000. You see, all laptop displays are

Inspiron 4000: A great choice if money is an issue, but power is still the top priority.



meant to function optimally at certain set resolutions. For most screens these days, that resolution is 1024x768 (as is the case with 14" TFT screen that comes standard on the 14000), which is great, but far shy of the 1400x1050 resolution of the new 15000e and 8000. If you're really power hungry (and can afford it), both of these high-end Inspirons can also be fitted with a 15" Ultra XGA screen with a default resolution of 1600x1200! Of course, like any display, you don't have to stay at the default resolution, but unlike a regular CRT-type monitor, there is some distortion associated with the change. In games, the distortion is so slight you won't ever notice it, but when surfing the 'net or typing, you might. Still, on the screens Dell is using here, the distortion is just about as minimal as is possible given existing technology.

Once upon a time, when considering the purchase of a laptop, the end user (that's you) had to contend with miniscule amounts of system RAM and horribly

PORTABLE DVD

While it's possible to have CD-ROM drives installed in any of these Inspirons instead of the DVD-ROM drives that come standard, you'd almost have to be a fool to go that direction! While the included DVD decoding software isn't the best we've ever seen, it does get the job done and makes quick work of long car or airplane rides — especially if you're the one behind the wheel! (*Damn you, Voderman! Dear readers, don't ever use a laptop while driving a car or flying an airplane. — Ed.*)

Inspiron 5000e: This beast is all screen! At 15", this TFT is nearly impossible to beat.



SYSTEM SPECS

Dell Inspiron Laptops (as configured for review — systems can be individually customized on Dell's website)

■ **14000**
 Weight: 5.9 pounds
 Processor: Pentium III 800MHz with Intel SpeedStep technology
 Display: 14.1" XGA TFT
 Memory: 128MB PC-100 SDRAM
 Hard Drive: 20GB
 Video: ATI Rage Mobility 128 w/16MB SDRAM
 Removable Media: Modems: 1.44MB Floppy Disk Drive and 8X Max Variable DVD-RDM drive
 Battery: 9-Cell, "smart" Li-Ion good for up to 3.5 hours
 Communications: 56k V.90 Modem
 Sound: ESS Maestro 3I
 OS: Windows ME
 Productivity Applications: MS Works Suite

■ **15000e**
 Weight: 6.75 pounds
 Processor: Pentium III 800MHz with Intel SpeedStep technology
 Display: 15.1" SXGA+ TFT
 Memory: 128MB PC-100 SDRAM
 Hard Drive: 30GB
 Video: ATI Rage Mobility 128 w/16MB
 Fixed Media Modules: 1.44MB Floppy Disk Drive and 8X Max Variable DVD-RDM drive
 Battery: 9-Cell, "smart" Li-Ion good for up to 3 hours
 Communications: 56k V.90 Modem
 Sound: ESS Maestro 2E; Dolby AC3 decoder; Positional 3D Audio; RW Waveblasts
 OS: Windows ME
 Productivity Applications: MS Office Small Business Edition

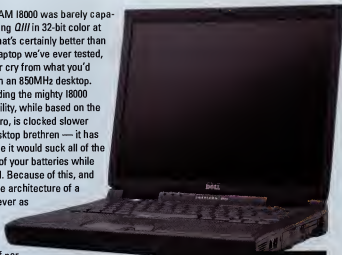
■ **18000**
 Weight: 7.2 pounds
 Processor: Pentium III 800MHz
 Display: 15.1" SXGA+ TFT
 Memory: 128MB PC-100 SDRAM
 Hard Drive: 20GB ATA-66
 Video: ATI Rage Mobility M4 w/32MB
 Fixed Media Modules: 1.44MB Floppy Disk Drive and 8X Max Variable DVD-RDM drive
 Battery: 9-Cell, "smart" Li-Ion good for up to 3 hours
 Communications: 56k V.90 Modem
 Sound: ESS Maestro 2E; Dolby AC3 decoder; Positional 3D Audio; RW Waveblasts
 OS: Windows ME
 Productivity Applications: MS Office Small Business Edition
 Extra: IEEE 1394 port

underpowered CPUs — often half the speed or less than the fastest desktop processors. Thankfully, that's not really an issue any more, and Dell lets you go faster than you'd probably expect; all three of the Inspirons we were sent came with 850MHz Mobile Pentium IIIs, and that speed, combined with the 128MB of PC-100 SDRAM (you can opt for up to 512MB RAM) and ATI's Rage Mobility chips means that these systems are some of the most powerful mobile computers that money can buy.

That doesn't mean that they have to be fantastic gaming machines, though. While the Rage Mobility M4 in the 18000 came with a whopping 32MB RAM (that's a hell of a lot for a laptop), the 15000e's Rage Mobility 128 came with only 16MB, and the one in the 14000 came with only 8MB. What does this mean in terms of game performance? It means that you shouldn't expect to play many 3D games in true color or at high resolutions. While we were able to play many games acceptably in 16-bit color at resolutions of up to 1024x768 on all three laptops (with some graphic effects turned off — in *Quake III*, when testing in 16-bit color, we saw the texture detail down one notch and went from trilinear filtering to bilinear), even the

32MB SDRAM 18000 was barely capable of running *Quill* in 32-bit color at 800x600. That's certainly better than any other laptop we've ever tested, but it's a far cry from what you'd expect from an 850MHz desktop. What's holding the mighty 18000 back? Mobility, while based on the Rage 128 Pro, is clocked slower than its desktop brethren — it has to be or else it would suck all of the power out of your batteries while on the road. Because of this, and because the architecture of a laptop is never as efficient as that of a desktop, this level of performance isn't terribly surprising. But don't be overly discouraged — the truth is, if you need a laptop, all three of these will play your games well — just not as well as a desktop. Sadly, the dream of true equality for laptops is still a ways out.

When it comes to cool features, Dell really knows how to roll out the red carpet. Take SpeedStep, for example. This technology allows the CPUs in the 5000e and 4000 to be underclocked while running on



Inspiron 8000: This is the big boy — the laptop to get when money is no object.

batteries as a way to conserve power. This is beneficial because while mobile CPUs may draw less power than standard CPUs, the faster the CPU, the more power it's going to eat. In the case of the 850MHz PIIIs found in our review systems, the clock can be brought all the way down to 700MHz when on the go, the end result being a longer battery charge.

Additionally, just like trendy mobile phones, the 14000 and 18000 can both be customized with colorful faceplates. Sure, it's a bit gimmicky, but at the same time, it's pretty cool, too. If you're a businessman you can leave your laptop a drab dark gray, or, if you fancy yourself a hipster, you can pick something a bit more outrageous like bright yellow. Better still, you can change the plates later if you tire of any one color.

In the end, even a fully decked-out Inspiron 8000 isn't going to replace your desktop system. It will come very close when it comes to productivity software, but last time we checked, *PC Productivity Magazine* wasn't the name of our publication. That said, these are the best laptops available for gaming today and that makes them worth your time, money, and effort if you're in the market for a laptop. Plus, they're from Dell, which means they're very customizable and come with a fantastic three-year warranty.



If you're looking for a bit of color, the 14000 comes with different colorful faceplates that you can change on a whim.

BENCHMARKS

QUAKE III

(All tests run in 32-bit color with all graphic effects set to max)

14000	15000e	18000
640x480x32-bit color: 28.4fps	640x480x32-bit color: 27.4fps	640x480x32-bit color: 33.7fps
800x600x32-bit color: 14.2fps	800x600x32-bit color: 15.2fps	800x600x32-bit color: 24.4fps
1024x768x32-bit color: failed	1024x768x32-bit color: 13.1fps	1024x768x32-bit color: 16.2fps
640x480x16-bit color: 44.6fps	640x480x16-bit color: 61.0fps	640x480x16-bit color: 62.4fps
800x600x16-bit color: 32.2fps	800x600x16-bit color: 42.0fps	800x600x16-bit color: 44.8fps
1024x768x16-bit color: 26.5fps	1024x768x16-bit color: 27.3fps	1024x768x16-bit color: 28.2fps

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS Rage Mobility; fastest CPUs on the market today; amazingly good display quality.

LOWS Still considerably slower than your average middle to high-end desktop for playing games.

BOTTOM LINE While not the portable gaming system of our dreams, the Inspiron represents the state of the art as it stands today.

■ MICROSOFT

SideWinder Force Feedback 2

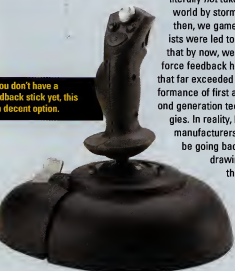
COMPANY
Microsoft
www.sidewinder.com

PRICE
\$109 (M.S.R.P.)

An interesting thing has happened in the world of force feedback technology—it hasn't taken off. That's right, despite all the hullabaloo a couple of years

back, the technology has quite literally not taken the world by storm. Back then, we game journalists were led to believe that by now, we'd have force feedback hardware that far exceeded the performance of first and second generation technologies. In reality, hardware manufacturers seem to be going back to the drawing board these days

If you don't have a feedback stick yet, this is a decent option.



in an attempt to come up with less expensive technologies that will appeal to wider audiences; case in point, Microsoft's new SideWinder Force Feedback 2.

First things first: if you've already got a feedback stick like the original SideWinder or Logitech's excellent WingMan Force, there isn't really much for you to see here. In fact, the stick you've already got is just as good if not better than this new one. While Microsoft would have us believe that this stick is more precise than the original (and we're sure that on paper they could show us how it's true—then again, the "magic bullet" theory looks pretty good on paper, also), the reality is that it doesn't quite feel as good or as accurate as its predecessor. It's still quite good, though—it's just not an improvement in any appreciable way over the older stick—except when it comes to its lower price tag and internal power supply (farewell to the large power brick).

This new SideWinder comes ready for battle with a twist-axis, eight fully programmable buttons, a throttle, and an eight-way hat switch. Each of these vari-

ous buttons and controls can be customized for use with your favorite games using Microsoft's included Game Controller software— one of the most powerful and easy-to-use programs of this sort available anywhere. We tested the stick with many a game and found the forces to be quite snappy. That said, we didn't find the button layout on the top of the stick quite as satisfying. The older layout seems superior to us in just about every way. Still, in the end, for around a hundred bucks, if you've still got the itch to twitch, the Force Feedback 2 is a good deal for the money.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS Considerably lower price tag than predecessor; convincing force effects; internal power supply.

LOWS Overall, not quite up to the original's high standards; button layout could have been better.

BOTTOM LINE It's not the best, but it's good and it's relatively inexpensive. Try one before buying.

■ CREATIVE LABS

Annihilator 2 Ultra

COMPANY
Creative Labs
(877) 853-8227
www.creative.com

PRICE
\$499 (M.S.R.P.)

Holly s— (cut by Ed. — Ed.)! The Annihilator 2 Ultra is a fast card. Can I say that word? (No — Ed.) Oh well, if not, "down with the Man" is all I have to say, because there's really no other way to put it: this card is that damn fast (well, I guess there's that way to say it, too).

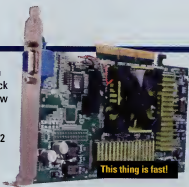
For those of you not in the know, the GeForce 2 GTS just got a facelift. Where

there was once a 200MHz core clock speed there is now a 250MHz core in its place. Where there was once 32 to 64MB of 166MHz DDR RAM (effectively 333MHz) there is now 64MB of 233MHz DDR (effectively 466MHz) memory. Yes, it's fair to say that the GeForce 2 Ultra makes a whipping boy of every other 3D card on the planet. Plus, with this card's extra bandwidth, anti-aliasing is much more of a real feature than on previous iterations of the GeForce technology.

Creative Labs, not a company to let this sort of power slip through its fingers, has put the newest NVIDIA chip into is Annihilator 2 Ultra—with some truly awe-inspiring results. Like so many of Creative's boards these days, the Ultra is what you might call a "no frills" product in that it doesn't come with any extras such as TV or digital flat panel outs. Creative usually makes its cards

in this manner as a way to save it—and you—money. And considering the price of this "vanilla" GeForce 2 Ultra card, we think it was a wise decision to go that route yet again. Just be aware that if you're looking to output a signal to your TV, you're going to have to go with one of the other Ultra cards that will be out soon.

Be advised: as fast as this card is, don't be fooled into thinking you need one if you're got a GeForce, GeForce2, Voodoo5, or Radeon. Be happy with what you've got—unless you're rich, in which case, party on!



This thing is fast!

BENCHMARKS (ALL TESTS RUN ON 1GHz ATHLON SYSTEM)

3DMARK 2000 (D3D)

(All tests run in 32-bit color with 24-bit Z and triple buffer)

• 800x600

3DMarks: 7,089

• Game 1 Helicopter

Low Detail: 141.6fps

Med Detail: 106.7fps

High Detail: 82.0fps

• Game 2 Adventure

Low Detail: 158.1fps

Med Detail: 78.9fps

High Detail: 45.0fps

• Fill Rate with multitexturing: 766.6 million texels per second

= 1124x768

3DMarks: 5,975

• Game 1 Helicopter

Low Detail: 136.3fps

Med Detail: 92.4fps

High Detail: 45.0fps

• Game 2 Adventure

Low Detail: 113.0fps

Med Detail: 72.5fps

High Detail: 44.5fps

• Fill Rate with multitexturing: 756.8 million texels per second

QUAKE III (OPENGL)

(All tests run in 32-bit color with T&L enabled and graphic effects set to max)

600x400: 112.0fps

800x600: 180.5fps

1024x768: 100.4fps

1280x1024: 74.0fps

1600x1200: 50.0fps

MDK2 (OPENGL)

(All tests run in 32-bit color with T&L enabled and graphic effects set to max)

800x600: 125.7fps

1024x768: 118.3fps

1280x1024: 85.1fps

1600x1200: 57.2fps

sacrifice



TO WHICH GOD WILL YOU
MAKE YOURS?

A sacrifice to
Persephone GODDESS OF LIFE

would be good for your soul...

We are Persephone, we are the essence of life, the great healer who mends the ills of the flesh and cleanses the impurity of the soul. Our vision is one of peace, our path of mercy. We shall guide you down the true path and you shall possess power overwhelming, and our covenant with you shall be as simple and strong as it is pure.

-- Persephone, Goddess of Life


sacrifice



Declare war against other disciples in intense multiplayer action.



The souls of the fallen await redemption!
Reincarnate them into your service!



Please the Gods...
Make your Sacrifice.



The false temples of other Gods await destruction!
Your God will be pleased, very pleased...

A sacrifice to

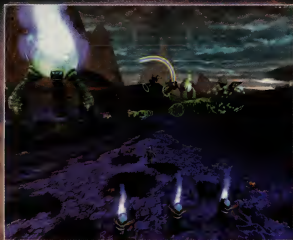
Charnel GOD OF DEATH

offers the power of destruction
and carnage.

I am Charnel, the God of Strife, Lord of Slaughter, Master of Death. Where there is pain, I am. Where there is suffering, I flourish. Without conflict, without struggle, without me to hate, who would have cause to call themselves just? Only a fool would seek contentment in peace and tranquility.

-- Charnel, God of Death

sacrifice



Your creatures need you! Cast deadly spells to rid them.



Make a Sacrifice, secure your victory, your God feeds well.



Choose a God...
Make your Sacrifice.



The dark beauty of Camelot's world awaits...

NO GREATER sacrifice

SACRIFICE

GENRE: REAL-TIME STRATEGY
DEVELOPER: SHINY ENTERTAINMENT
PUBLISHER: INTERPLAY ENTERTAINMENT CORP.
FOR MORE INFORMATION: WWW.INTERPLAY.COM

- Choose one of five gods and challenge up to four players over the Internet or LAN on a dynamic, ever-changing battlefield.
- Multiple paths and decisions throughout Sacrifice's single player campaign makes each time through a unique storytelling experience.
- Crush your foes using fearsome monsters and powerful magic.
- Over 50 spells and 50 creatures await your every command.
- Beauty on an unprecedented scale, over 100,000 frames of handcrafted animation.
- Colossal worlds are yours to explore.



COMING THIS FALL

"Best PC Game of the Show."
- ECTS 2000

"Sacrifice is a fantastic, visually stunning union of art and technology that sets the standard for others to follow."
- NVIDIA Corp.

"The game is drop dead gorgeous."
- Daily Radar.com

"It appears to us that Shiny's entry into the RPG/RTS area is going to be very, very impressive."
- FiringSquad.com

"Sacrifice will rip your imagination wide open and change your impression of real time strategy games."
- Tucows.com

"With its striking visuals, addictive game play, and offbeat humor, Sacrifice is definitely going to turn a few gamers' heads."
- Gameproworld.com

"Sacrifice seems to have it all: Gorgeous graphics, unique yet cohesive visual design, and the company's distinctive sense of humor."
- Next Generation

"Sacrifice is showing signs of pushing the creative boundaries for the RTS genre."
- Gamespy.com

"Interplay's best PC game, Sacrifice will be!"
- GameFan.com

"Sacrifice is shaping up to be one of the best looking games of the year."
- Voo.to/extreme.com



BY GAMERS, FOR GAMERS™



www.sacrifice.net

■ TURTLE BEACH

Santa Cruz

COMPANY
Turtle Beach
(800) 233-5377
www.turtlebeach.com

PRICE
\$99 (U.S.A.P.)

OTHER OPTIONS

Seating as it was Lisa's final order to me prior to her leaving PCG, I feel it's my duty to fill this space with text, even though there isn't much to say other than: if you're interested in learning about Creative's SBL line of sound cards, you can do so at www.soundblaster.com. Good luck, Lisa! We'll miss you!

Now that Aureal is all but down for the count (as we can see through Creative Labs in the process of acquiring what's left of the bankrupt company), companies like Turtle Beach have been forced to go on the hunt for new audio processors.

In the case of the Santa Cruz, TB has opted for Cirrus Logic's impressive SoundFusion chip. Though less powerful (on paper) than Creative Labs' EMU10K1, Turtle Beach has been able to design one heck of a card based on the Cirrus Logic technology.

Like any premium sound card, the Santa Cruz comes with a multitude of inputs: both front and rear channel outputs (just in case you've got a four-way speaker system), a joystick port, a microphone in jack, and the most interesting, a Versajack—a selectable

input that can function as a line-level headphone out (can be used to connect a subwoofer and center channel for true 5.1 surround sound), a stereo line in, or a digital out. If you want to change its duties,

you simply select the function of your choice from the software interface (no hardware adjustments required), and you'll be good to go! Though we never found ourselves using this input as anything other than a handy headphone out, its customizability is a stand-out feature to be sure.

Whenever you're dealing with a sound card that isn't either Creative Labs or Aureal-based, compatibility is a legitimate concern. In this case, you won't have to worry, though, because the Santa Cruz

comes with support for A3D 1.0, EAX 1.0 and 2.0, as well as DirectSound and Direct3D right out of the box. Not only that, but it reproduces both Aureal's and Creative's sound standards flawlessly. We didn't run into one situation where the card failed to perform up to or above our expectations—both in terms of sound quality and function.

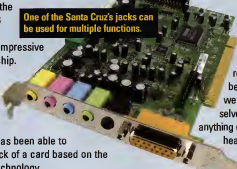
With Creative Labs pretty much running the show these days, it's nice to see a company like Turtle Beach, with a long history of producing some of the best sound cards on the market, rising to the occasion and producing yet another winner.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS Excellent compatibility, Versajack; great sound.

LOWS It's Creative's ball game these days. In the long run, the Santa Cruz may fall behind the curve as a result of new software updates for the Live! cards.

BOTTOM LINE Turtle Beach adds another great card to its long list of excellent products.



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PERFORMANCE PC SYSTEMS

CUSTOM SETUPS

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WWW.HYPERSONIC-PC.COM

SILVER BULLET LE

800MHz AMD Thunderbird
Asus A7V KT133 Motherboard ATA100
128MB PC133 7.5ns SDRAM
15GB IBM 75GXP ATA100 7200rpm
44MB Hercules Geforce2 GTS DDR/TV
Innerswaks™ Video Cooling & Optimization
Toshiba 48X CD-ROM
SoundBlaster Live! X Gamer Volume
Elite Imaging ACS34 4.1 Surround
3COM 3C905 10/100MB Fast Ethernet
Microsoft Internet Keyboard
Microsoft IntellMouse PS/2
HyperSonic PC ATK Beige Tower Case
Microsoft Windows Millennium
Personalized System Recovery CD
Personalized System Information Binder
One Year Warranty (Shipping, Parts, Labor)
Three Year Toll-Free Technical Support

PRICE, \$1499

SILVER BULLET

1000MHz (1GHz) AMD Thunderbird
Asus A7V KT133 Motherboard ATA100
128MB PC133 7.5ns SDRAM
15GB IBM 75GXP ATA100 7200rpm
44MB Hercules Geforce2 ULTRA DDR/TV
Innerswaks™ Video Cooling & Optimization
Toshiba 12X/40X DVD w/ Power DVD
SoundBlaster Live! X Gamer Volume
Klipsch ProMedia v2-400 4.1 Surround
3COM 3C905 10/100MB Fast Ethernet
Microsoft Internet Keyboard
Logitech Mouseman Wheel Optical
HyperSonic PC ATK Beige Tower Case
Microsoft Windows Millennium
Personalized System Recovery CD
Personalized System Information Binder
One Year Warranty (Shipping, Parts, Labor)
Three Year Toll-Free Technical Support

PRICE, \$2099

SONIC BOOM A/V

1.2GHz (1100MHz) AMD Thunderbird
Asus A7V KT133 Motherboard ATA100
256MB PC133 7.5ns SDRAM
45GB IBM 75GXP ATA100 7200rpm
Toshiba 12X/40X DVD w/ Power DVD
Plexor 12/10/32A CD-RW (Burn Proof)
44MB Hercules Geforce2 ULTRA DDR/TV
Innerswaks™ Video Cooling & Optimization
SoundBlaster Live! X Gamer Platinum 5.1
Klipsch ProMedia v2-400 4.1 Surround
3COM 3C905 10/100MB Fast Ethernet
Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer (Optical)
Microsoft Internet Keyboard Pro
HyperSonic PC ATK Beige Tower Case
Microsoft Windows Millennium
Personalized System Recovery CD
Personalized System Information Binder
One Year Warranty (Shipping, Parts, Labor)
Three Year Toll-Free Technical Support

PRICE, \$3299

SONIC SCREAM A/V/R

1.2GHz (1100MHz) AMD Thunderbird
Asus A7V KT133 Motherboard ATA100
256MB PC133 7.5ns SDRAM
Dual Channel RAID Controller (RAID 0)
2x 45GB IBM 75GXP ATA100 7200rpm
Plexor 12/10/32A CD-RW (Burn Proof)
Toshiba 12X/40X DVD-ROM
RealMagic Hollywood Plus DVD Decoder
44MB Hercules Geforce2 ULTRA DDR/TV
Innerswaks™ Video Cooling & Optimization
SoundBlaster Live! X Gamer Platinum 5.1
Midland RM-7602 Headphone/Microphone
Midland SA-2020 S.1 Dolby Digital System
w/ ADS2000 Digital Stereo (AC-3)
3COM 3C905 10/100MB Fast Ethernet
Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer
Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro
HyperSonic PC ATK Beige Tower Case
Microsoft Windows Millennium
Personalized System Recovery CD
Personalized System Information Binder
One Year Warranty (Shipping, Parts, Labor)
Three Year Toll-Free Technical Support

PRICE, \$3999

MONITORS

17" NEC-Mitsubishi 70 27mm \$249
17" NEC-Mitsubishi FE700 25mm \$329
19" Viewsonic (Block) \$439 26mm \$439
19" NEC-Mitsubishi 91 25mm \$519
22" NEC-Mitsubishi 120 25mm \$799
22" NEC-Mitsubishi 200 24mm \$999

DIGITAL VIDEO

IEEE-1394 Orangelink PC Firewire w/ Adobe Premiere LE
IEEE-1394 FireWire MiniVideo DV2000 PC Firewire w/ Adobe Premiere 5.1
IEEE-1394 Pinpoint MiniVideo DV500 RT PC Firewire w/ Adobe Premiere 5.1

"HyperSonic was a first time entrant into our Ultimate Gaming Machine roundup last December, but its SILVER BULLET came, saw, and kicked ours in our 'Bang for the Buck' category."
- CGW December 1999 -



"THE SONIC BOOM from HyperSonic is a Hyper Sonic gaming rig, tweaked to perfection and loaded with the best parts available."

- PC Gamer July 2000 -

I don't know really how to say this, but I had a few doubts about the buzz on your new RADEON™ gamer boards. I checked out your so-called RADEON™ GPU with its integrated T&L acceleration and ultra-fast DDR to speed up my Quake™ III Arena framerate. Not only does RADEON™ have awesome high-quality performance but it supports more advanced 3D games and upcoming DirectX™ 8.0 features than any other graphics board. The DVD playback feature will come in handy when I need to take a break from gaming. And, I have to admit the video capture and TV-output option on RADEON™ 64MB DDR makes it a must-have. But, just remember, the only opinion of RADEON™ that matters is mine and I have only one thing to say to you ATI



Gimme
Radeon!



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Visit ati.com

Having problems? Your luck's about to change!



This is good packaging, but we still prefer the GeForce 2 MX.

Q I have been building myself a "budget" gaming system in my spare time, and I need to pick a video card. I am trying to decide between NVIDIA's GeForce 2 MX, and 3dfx's Voodoo 4. Both of these cards can be purchased for around \$150, but I have not been able to find any articles comparing the two. Which one do you recommend? Also, and this is a bit off topic, do AMD's new Thunderbird and Duron CPUs have as many compatibility problems as the original Athlon did when it first launched?

— Joe Krah, via the Internet

A My preference? I lean toward the GeForce 2 MX. It's faster, and I have much more faith in NVIDIA these days when it comes to support — driver updates especially — than I do in 3dfx. As for lingering compatibility issues, now that Intronate is behind us, Athlon is a much more stable platform, and that includes Duron and Thunderbird. I've had a Thunderbird at home for a couple of months now, and I haven't run into a single problem!

Q Can you please stop posting "only" benchmarks in your video card reviews? Although I do care about the speed of a card, at the point at which games are running at a "mighty" 130fps on card X instead of a "paltry" 125fps on card Y, I no longer care. What I do care about is visual quality. So few reviewers consider the importance that visual quality makes when playing a game. To give you an example, I have traditionally owned 3dfx and NVIDIA-based cards

because I felt speed was essential. Last year, I made a change and bought an ATI MAXX 64 MB. My jaw dropped when I started playing through all of my old games; they looked so much better! Video cards like the ATI Fury MAXX and Matrox G400 never got the credit they deserved for their aya-popping visuals. Pleasa, stop with all the quantitative benchmarks and start giving us some screenshots so we can gauge image quality.

— Claudius, via the Internet

A Whenever a new card comes out and it has markedly improved image quality, I'm the first person to mention it in a review. If you go back and look at the reviews of both of the cards you mentioned as "never getting the credit they deserved" you'll see that I talked about image quality in both. I also don't agree that the average game looks *that* much better on a GeForce. Plus, showing the difference in screen shots is almost impossible given the size of the screenshots in the magazine. Still, always know that I will be the first to talk about image quality if it's in any way out of the ordinary.

Q I want to know if I should keep my IBM Aptiva or bury it out in the yard. It has an AMD K6-2 processor, 64MB of RAM, a 10GB hard drive, a Zip drive, a PCI modem, and a few other balls and whistles.

I recently installed a Voodoo3 2000 and a Sound Blaster PCI 512 to get it a bit more up to date, but my system still doesn't seem to be fast

enough. I'm thinking about adding more RAM and another hard drive, but I have a few questions:

- 1.) How does my system compare to your entry-level system listed on the Trinity page?
- 2.) How do the new Celerons and K6-2s compare to my existing K6-2?
- 3.) Can you recommend a good motherboard and case that I can use with the AMD K6-2?
- 4.) Will the IBM components I already have work on a new motherboard in a new system?
- 5.) I record audio and work with MIDI quite often. Will a MOTU or similar audio card run PC games?
- 6.) Should I keep the Aptiva or burn it? Help ma!

— Namewithheld by request, via the Internet

NEED HELP?

If you have a hardware question or comment, or a personal problem, write to: Greg Vederman, Hard Stuff, PC Gamer, 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005 or E-mail: gvederman@pcgamer.com

A 1.) Your system is probably very much slower than our entry-level system. The K6-2 has never really been a very good processor for playing games — regardless of its clock speed. 2.) Don't bother with faster K6-2s. The newer Celerons are much, much faster than your existing K6-2.

DEARGREG



Yes, this is scary. And we promise to never run this picture again.

If you do choose to sneak out and capture a Vederman (or possibly purchase one on the black market), be forewarned that you will need plenty of nacho chips, nudie magazines, and a hefty supply of sturdy, non-sea-treating paper bags, so as to hide its hideous features. If the Vederman goes berserk, ha sure you have plenty of cameras handy, as nothing makes a Vederman happier than snaling plenty of photos of itself. And when the time comes to replace your Vederman, 2x4s are quite cheap — as is gasoline and barbed wire.

— Sean Bradley, via the Internet

Q Hammy the hamster has been gone now for quite some time, yet a replacement has yet to be found. I think the next animal that PCG should get is a Vederman. I know, I know, they are getting very rare nowadays with all the over hunting (even strict federal regulations can't stop overzealous hunters from brutally hunting them down, dragging them into clearings, and beating them over the head with flaming 2x4s wrapped in barbed wire), but I think a Vederman would make an interesting, albeit horrifying, pet to have around the office.

A I'd respond to you at length if I could, Sean, but wouldn't you know it? Thanks in no small part to your E-mail, Rob, Dan, and the rest of the gang have shoved me into Hammy's old habitat and are presently "cooing" and throwing sunflower seeds at me like a pack of deranged morons. Wow, do these wood shavings itch!

And, man, couldn't they have cleaned this filthy thing out a bit before putting me in here with all of the old hamster droppings? And, hey guys, there's still Hammy pee in here!

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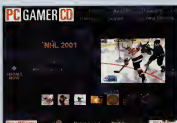
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- 3.) No, I can't do it! You don't want another K6-2! It's pure unadulterated evil! I shall not recommend a board.
- 4.) Yes, as long as the components aren't soldered to the motherboard, most of the important parts of your IBM should work in a new system (e.g. floppy drive, hard drive, CD-ROM drive, RAM — depending on what you upgrade to, etc.)
- 5.) No, those types of cards tend to have nothing to do with gaming, and it's unlikely that companies like MOTU would bother to spend the extra time and effort getting their cards to function in that sort of environment.
- 6.) Don't burn anything! But starting over with a new processor and motherboard isn't a bad idea. Stay away from the K6-2. Think happy thoughts about Celeron, Duron, or Athlon instead.

Q Okay, what gives? I can rarely get your damn CDs that come with the magazine to work on my computer. Am I the only one having this problem or what? Is there any hope for a solution?

— Name withheld,
via the Internet



Our interface may look the same, but we've revamped our CD to make it run smoother.

A As a matter of fact, there is! Starting with the

November 2000 CD, we've got an entirely new interface that should function much better on a broader array of system configurations. Give it whirl — it should work like a dream!

Q I should tell you right off the bat that I have the newest BIOS, video card, and sound card drivers for my system. Still, whenever I play *EverQuest*, I end up getting the dreaded blue screen of death about once or twice a day. I don't have to be doing anything specific in the game when it happens, either. When I play other games, I have no problems at all. I've installed virus software and scanned, re-installed *EverQuest* to see if it would end the problem, but it hasn't. At this point, the only other thing I can think of is my CPU. I have one of those older Celeron 300s overclocked to 450MHz, but it's been that way for the last year and is stable with all of the other games I play.

— Sean Corvex,
via the Internet



Why won't *EverQuest* run on Sean's machine? Greg thinks it's probably a processor problem.

A Sorry, Sean, it sounds like it's your processor. A while back, I had the same overclocked Celeron setup as you, and, as with your computer, it worked with all of my games — except for one: *Quake*. In fact, it wouldn't even let me install *Quake* without giving me a blue screen. I, too, tried to fight the notion that the problem had anything to do with my overclocked CPU — I even formatted my entire system to see if it would help — it didn't. In the end, I finally decided to try clocking my Celeron back down to 300MHz and the problem went away.

Unfortunately, overclocking isn't an exact science. But, just so you know, your system seems a lot more stable than others I've seen, so you should feel good about that at the very least.

Q I have a Voodoo3 1000. I can't find anything about it: specs, updated drivers, nothing! What is this silly thing? Please help!

— Nama withheld, via the Internet

A It's a 125MHz Voodoo3, Mr. Name Withheld. It's the least expensive of the Voodoo3 boards, and companies like Compaq and Gateway often use it in their "gaming" systems. You say you haven't been able to find any information on this card? Have you tried the 3dfx website (www.3dfx.com)? You'll find some info there as well as drivers. And nothing about this topic is silly, doohus!

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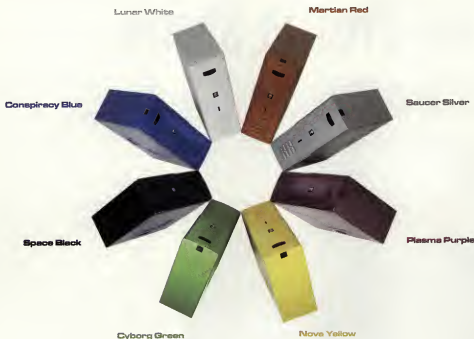
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Putting the Pros to Shame

Professional game developers had better start panicking. *Firearms for Half-Life* is yet another "amateur" masterpiece.



Get this: *Firearms*, a *Half-Life* mod currently monopolizing *PC Gamer's* leisure time (and too much actual work time — Ed), was produced by a team of Danish and American amateurs working from their individual homes over a period of four months, and with a budget of exactly \$00.00. Did I mention that *Firearms* is probably the most fun any of us have had on our PC in maybe a year?

How is this happening? From now on, I want "professional" outfits to design just the engines. I want all my actual gameplay provided by amateurs from the wilds of Europe, because this is just getting ridiculous. I've spent more time on the "River" level of *Firearms* than I did on *Soldier of Fortune*, *KISS: Psycho Circus*, and *Daikatana* combined.

The only guy on the *Firearms* team with professional games experience is Ben Irwin, an artist on *Black & White*. The rest of the crew, including coordinator Caspar Milan Nielsen from Denmark, work outside the industry.

Not too long ago, the appearance of such a great mod from an amateur team would have

been met with amused chuckles, sort of a "How cute and novel!" attitude. But I've lost that attitude. It's evolved beyond novelty. I'm now wondering why it is that pro teams funded to the tune of millions can't deliver a good game in two years when they're working with an established engine.

In *Apocalypse Now*, Colonel Kurtz rhapsodizes about the Viet Cong, who were willing to amputate the limbs of children in order to bend a village to their will: "If I had ten divisions of such men, then our troubles over here would be over very quickly." If I had the CEO of a major games publisher, I would be muttering the same thing about these amateur developers. Screw the high-salary, low-turn-around teams pumping out mediocre games. Just license the *Quake* or *Unreal* engine and let some kids go to town.

The good news is that these undiscovered talents won't stay underground for long. The FA Team, as they call themselves, are already cozy with Valve and will more than likely be a compensated part of the *Platinum Edition* release and beyond. Good for them. It would

be predictably smirky for me to say that I hope their success encourages other talented unknowns, but I don't have to hope. When that random game programmer goes home at six or seven in the evening and stops by the bank to cash his paycheck, it's 3 a.m. somewhere else in the world and a guy is ICQing his co-developers doing unpaid work on a game that may well rock just as hard.

TEAM FORTRESS 2...EARLY

Firearms is essentially a time-machine peek at *Team Fortress 2*, at least a year ahead of the real deal. And the scary thing is, it's difficult to imagine *TF2* being much more enjoyable. Of course, *TF2* will be in a different league graphics-wise, and will incorporate technologies that the FA Team simply doesn't have access to. But in terms of sheer fun, *Firearms* seems to do almost everything that Valve promises *TF2* would do.

There are levels where you parachute into combat; you can shoot enemies on the ground as you drift downward, and the enemy can shoot you right out of the sky. If you parachute into barbed wire, you'll be injured. You can break your leg in a fall, or if you take a bullet in the leg. Damage models are quasi-realistic, and a bullet from a Barrett sniper rifle is an almost guaranteed one-shot stop. The real-world arsenal includes M-60 machine guns, M-16 assault rifles, MP5 submachine guns, 45 pistols, PSG-1 sniper rifles from Heckler & Koch, grenades, claymore mines, and even mortars, which can be sighted with artillery markers for indirect fire.

The level design is hit-and-miss, but there are several levels that are flat-out brilliant, and offer rival squads a tactically thrilling match. *Teamwork* is essential, and there is a premium placed on communication, since the coordinated timing of assaults on different parts of the map is often the key to victory.



Sniping has never been more fun... take a long last look around, buddy, 'cuz it's time for lights out.

The nuts and bolts of combat are thrilling in a way that most FPS multiplayer modes can only hope to be. While prone and crawling around the corner of a building, you might get your head taken off by a sniper lying prone in a window two stories above. You could run over a claymore hidden in a hedge and be blown sky-high by a booby-trap you never even saw. Heavy machine guns can shoot right through the thin plaster walls of a house and kill you in the hallway on the other side. There are heavy .50 caliber guns built into pillboxes and you can man them, unleashing a torrent of lead on advancing enemies. In short, it's a hectic, white-knuckled warzone.

Most impressive is the fact that these boys are just getting warmed up. We're not even playing the final rev — it's a beta version that's been occupying all our time. By press time, the FA Team should have released its final build, and we can only guess at how much improvement there will be. You can find *Firearms* at www.firearmsmod.com.

EVOLUTION

In the meantime, it might be wise for FPS game companies to re-read Darwin's *Origin of Species* for a refresher course in natural selection. There is a new animal loose in the wilderness, and it's leaner, smarter, and better suited for survival than these established game houses. Crews like the FA Team represent the leading edge of a new chapter in the history of games. Unfunded, unsupervised, and unaccountable to any corporate structure, these groups are churning out dizzyingly competitive products at no cost and in a minimal length of time.

I don't want to hear arguments about how these products are "just" mods. These "just" mods are kicking two different kinds of ass. As of *Firearms*, they're officially making a mockery of the multiplayer modes in almost any "pro" FPS I can think of. And by the way,

You can actually shoot enemies out of the sky as they parachute into battle.



Firearms isn't some kind of weird exception. Recently in San Francisco, Sierra hosted a Mod Exposition that showed off the current efforts of several previously-undiscovered teams. All of their stuff looks fantastic, and it looked fantastic long before Sierra got involved with them. Sierra is wisely bundling a bunch of these new mods into a commercial disc (the *Half-Life Platinum Edition*) to capitalize on this untapped brilliance.

My hope is that this distribution model will become more common, more viable, and more economically rewarding for crews like the FA Team. I want more mod collections assembled by the brand managers of big engines, released to the public with minimal interference from in-house QA or (God forbid) market analysts.

Imagine: people have been slaving over these mods when all they expected was for the mod to be disseminated by a cumbersome download. What if they could aspire to commercial distribution on CD-ROM with the marketing backing of a major publisher? The

mind boggles at how great these games could be when coming from a crew motivated by the promise of this kind of distribution system.

I'm not too worried about it, because any sane publisher will realize soon enough that they need to be allied with these upstarts or risk being run over by the speed and precision with which these crews execute their designs. I think we're at the beginning of a revolution similar to the one kicked off by guerrilla filmmakers of the early 1990s, when smart, hungry, self-funded directors made bloated, big-budget Hollywood gasp. Today, those same guerrillas are at the wheel of many of Hollywood's bigger-scale ventures. The same will happen with games, and thank goodness.

Innovation is an unstoppable force, and groups like the FA Team are serving notice (whether they know it or not) that the days of slow, costly, uninspired game development are waning. Establishment developers may have cause to be panicking, but for PC gamers, it's cause for celebration.

PCG

BUG PATCHES

- **Age of Empires II v2.0a (age2upa.exe)**
 - Stability Improvements: A number of crashes and multiplayer out of sync bugs have been fixed, resulting in improved game stability.
 - You can no longer build a Fish Trap on top of an existing fish resource.
 - The game no longer crashes when you set a flare or waypoint location at the very Southernmost point on the map.
 - You can no longer build a Farm or Wall on top of a partially cut section of forest.
 - Units no longer ignore orders under some circumstances.
- **KISS Psycho Circus: The Nightmare Child v.1 (kpcctch1.exe)**
 - Added 6 new multiplayer maps.
 - Fixed texture not showing up on Nightmare child's cocoon.
 - Optimized multiplayer bandwidth usage.
 - Added new connection settings in multiplayer

player setup menu.

- Added a dedicated server.
- Added gibbing in multiplayer.
- Added effect for invulnerability.
- **Battlezone II v1.1 (BattlezoneIIupdateUS.exe)**
 - Win2000 compatibility.
 - Small framerate speedups.
 - More reliable network communications.
 - Game balance tweaks.
 - Multiplayer Instant Action mode (MPI).
 - A team of humans against the CPU in strategy.
 - 10 New multiplayer maps of various types.
- **Shogun: Total War v1.1 (STWv11.exe)**
 - Alphabetically sorts name lists on the chat server.
 - Option to talk to just players in your game or just allies in your game.
 - There is a battlefield map info button in the multiplayer lobby.
 - Online multiplayer games performance has

been optimized to improve performance on low bandwidth/low speed connections.

- **Quake III Arena v1.25 Point Release (Q3PointRelease_125.exe)**
 - CD check disabled.
 - Fixed auto download code.
 - Fixed dropped sounds bug.
 - New pure server code.
 - Added score balloons that appear over targets/locations where the player has scored individual points.
 - Added the Defense Award and medal for defensive actions in team play.
 - Modified awards for individual scores.
- **Crimson Skies v1.01 (crmsk101.exe)**
 - Single player saved game status no longer inadvertently reset to the first mission by playing multiplayer or by customizing a plane in Instant Action. (How on earth did Microsoft miss this bug? — Ed.)



THE POINT AFTER

BASEBALL · BASKETBALL · FOOTBALL · HOCKEY · GOLF · SOCCER · ETC.

Keep It Real

The more knowledge we're given, the more we can become part of the fantasy world of sports simulations.

Watch any sporting event on TV these days, and the number of stats at the announcer's beck and call is ludicrous. No, these guys aren't *Rain Man* savants...they have a group of statisticians working in the background, feeding them this occasionally enlightening, oftentimes-useless information.

For the common fan, most of this numerical mumbo-jumbo has little impact. Does anyone really need to know that Fred Ballplayer is hitting three points higher on the road than at home when facing a left-handed pitcher, at night, during the month of September, with a man on second, and less than two outs? For the designer of a computer game, though, even the most obscure stat can be used to make the gameplay more realistic, the players behave more convincingly, and help the gamer feel that he's taking part in a simulation, not a simple game.

Let me give you an example. You can pretty much count on the fact that after a basketball game, the stat guys will go over the game tape with a fine-toothed comb, and break down every possession a number of ways. Forget about blatantly obvious data like who scored on the play and who got the assist—I'm talking about stuff like how many passes were made around the perimeter, how many switches were made on defense, how long a mismatch was available...the meat and potatoes of what really goes on during a single play. By looking at each play, tendencies will develop, and patterns of play resolution will emerge.

In the hands of a crafty programmer, this kind of data could mean the difference between a bunch of players following some half-assed defensive algorithm, or those same players being able to replicate the reactions of real NBA players and the style of play for each individual and team. This also applies to fictional players, too. The more tendencies tracked, the greater the individuality of each player, resulting in a much more interesting dynamic.

Perhaps the easiest way to start all this is to obtain data on the men in charge of the teams—the general managers and coaches. This is information that can be tracked fairly easily: How much does the manager rely on his bullpen? Is a GM prone to give up young players too easily for established veterans?

When up by a goal, does a particular hockey coach go for the throat or will he pull back and try and run out the clock? How often does a football coach call a running play when it's third and two on his own 30-yard line? How about when he's on the opponent's thirty-yard line? Again, the more situations tracked will yield greater individuality.

Okay, let's assume that the cost and time to do this for each and every member of a major sports league is well beyond the budget of sports game makers. Why not build this kind of "reality" into the fantasy side of things? I'm one of those sports gamers that actually prefer using fictional players. The main reason is that there are no pre-existing expectations placed on these players, unlike the real deals. It allows for anomalies to occur without anyone thinking the programmers were smoking crack. Just imagine how bent out of shape most people would get if, in a supposedly statistically accurate baseball game, Brady Anderson of the Orioles hit 50 home runs one year, after averaging in the teens for his whole career. Of course we know that this actually happened, and so it should in our simulations.

I'm betting a lot more people would enjoy going the fictional route, too, if the world in

which you participated was filled with genuine personalities. Let's look at how much more interesting a dispersal draft might be if we knew some personal details about how fellow GMs operated. Let's say you have the fifth overall pick, and you have your eye on that blazing fast second baseman who stole 42 bases in his rookie year. Before the draft, you should do a little scouting—not of the players, but of the GMs! Do the ones ahead of you also cherish speed as an important asset? Do they want to use such an early pick on a young, barely proven talent? With just a few pieces of knowledge, wide vistas of gameplay can open up that helps to pull us further into the experience.

Don't get me wrong...the game played on the field will always be the most important element in any sports game, and sacrificing any part of it to include these suggestions would be unacceptable. But, once you have a game that delivers the goods, think about how much more enjoyable it would be if here was this whole other dimension. Most gaming is about playing a role, whether it be that of the quarterback, the fighter pilot, or the lone gunman with a thirst for blood. Roleplaying, though, is at its best when you have to interact with others in the world in rich and rewarding ways. Couple this interaction within the confines of a sports game, and I can easily see it becoming a breakthrough hit.

PCG



NBA Live 2001 is gonna be good, but Smoke thinks it could be even better.

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OPINION

Great X-Pectations?

PC gaming will survive, but the very existence of X-Box will likely change the FPS games we're playing.

Few corporations know how to strike fear into the hearts of men better than Microsoft. This year's Tokyo Game Show hinted at how the Seattle-based OmniCorp planned on dominating the world with the X-Box: instead of showing off tech demos with perfectly rendered ping-pong balls and dancing robots, Bill G's gangsta crew simply opted to hang enormous X-Box banners all over the convention hall, dwarfing the competition's ads. "All you hardware manufacturers are going down," the banners seemed to taunt. "Say it. Say it. I'm your daddy. Yeah. You like that, don't you?"

It's time to face the music: the X-Box is very likely to sweep the console market, annihilating the competition via a \$500 million dollar marketing firestorm. With a frightening number of third-party developers signed up, there's gonna be a whole lotta good games to play on the X-Box come 2001. Will Microsoft's set-top box kill the PC gaming market? No. Will it seriously affect the way you play games? You bet.

Here's the situation: when the PlayStation and the Saturn were released, PC developers had plenty of financial reason to keep doing their thing. Id Software kept making stuff on Wintel machines, while Acclaim continued to

crap out worthless movie-license games on set-top boxes. Any cross-platform "synergy" usually flopped big-time: craptacular PSX ports gave birth to the term "consoleitis," while PlayStation junkies wondered just how the hell they were supposed to play *Red Alert* with a friggin' gamepad. Different styles of games are suited for different types of systems, and that's fine by me. Case closed.

But what intrigues me is how a good percentage of established PC game companies — a lot of whom have never before tread onto the console battleground — have hopped onto the X-Box bandwagon, committing their next batch of titles for console release. The implications are sexy for PC developers: a single hardware spec to worry about, a huge user base, and no more profanity-laden technical support calls from the obsessive guy in Maryland who can't get the game working with his circa-1983 Pro Audio Spectrum.

And, if you haven't noticed, squeeze men typically turn a higher salary than 99 percent of PC developers, simply because the mass market prefers games like *Cabela's Rhinoceros Dung Collector* over *Thief II*. Most console gamers are looking for something decent to waste a few hours on, while the PC mass market (hereafter referred to as

"Bubba") wants something cheap that Grandpa can play on the new Compaq. Depressing, eh? On the PC, your best work will often likely result in obscurity and barely break-even sales; on the console, your chances for survival are a good deal better. "The problem with most PC games is that they cater to the highest-end hardware, which is owned by the smallest percentage of people," quips one X-Box/PC developer. "And don't forget the fact that a high-end video card costs as much as a PlayStation 2 — guess which one Timmy will get this Christmas."

And don't forget how PC-style first-person games on consoles are typically a mess. On a PC, you have a mouse and an assload of keys, while a console limits you to a gamepad with a pitiful number of buttons. This works fine in games with simplified control schemes (*Quake III*, single-player *Half-Life*), or games specifically built for console systems (Perfect Dark). But what of games with inately complex interfaces, such as *Deus Ex* or *System Shock 2*? I shudder at the thought of navigating JC Denton through a web of conspiracy using only a Sony Dual Shock controller.

As I see it, there are three outcomes:

- FPS developers will by necessity adopt a more console-centric perspective, specifically designing for the X-Box from day one. This means simpler interfaces and control schemes.
- A small hardcore contingent of developers damn the torpedoes, and keep producing FPS games geared to high-end PCs. X-Box versions are quickly ported near the end of the development cycle, and suffer the same fate as the Nintendo 64 version of *Rainbow Six*. The confused public ignores these games and buys *Tekken XVII* instead.
- Microsoft imposes a rigorous QA cycle on its signed FPS developers, ensuring that no games in the deadline-challenged genre are ever released. Texas self-destructs.

Ultimately, I don't foresee the end of the FPS world. There's even a small possibility that PC gamers will benefit from the new attention paid to streamlined controls. And it's also possible that the prevalence of FPS games on the X-Box will "train" casual gamers to the nuances of first-person greatness, in effect preparing them to graduate to the keyboard world of the PC. A symbiotic relationship between X-Box and Killing Box? We'll see.

PCG



Games like Unreal Tournament may suffer when (or if) they get ported to the X-Box.



Roads Less Traveled

Wolf hunts down some worthwhile shareware RPGs, and discovers that good games don't have to cost big bucks.



Siege of Avalon is an episodic RPG, with six chapters to be released over the period of a few months.

In this roleplaying renaissance, headlined by star power such as *Baldur's Gate*, *Fallout* and *EverQuest*, it's easy to overlook the smaller scale products that kept the genre alive through the dark ages. Here are some titles that cost a fraction of some of the big-name games, but can provide just as many hours of entertaining gameplay.

AVERNUM

It's the typical modus operandi of an evil empire — throw any citizens who dare speak out against the tyranny into a deep, dark hole from which no one has ever emerged. That's the plotline of *Avernium*, a roleplaying game from the shareware masters over at Spiderweb Software (www.spiderwebsoftware.com). This is the latest from the same company that brought us the *Exile* trilogy and *Netergate*. Just like its previous games, the gameplay hearkens to a time before CGI and 3D monsters. You steer a party of four around dank caverns and sprawling underground cities, questing and monster-slaying in turn-based tactical combat.

Like most shareware games, *Avernium* isn't for everyone. The graphics are definitely dated, but Spiderweb Software seems to have put a lot of consideration into its inter-

face — you can use the mouse exclusively, or stick solely with the keyboard depending on preference. It might not be *Deus Ex*, but it contains a ton of depth for those who don't mind a bit of dungeon-crawling. At only \$25 for the full version, it's hard to beat. To check it out, install the shareware demo from this month's CD in the Goodies folder.

KYLE'S QUEST

Kyle's Quest hasn't got a mention in *PC Gamer* simply because it's a roleplaying game for handheld PDAs using the PalmOS operating system, such as the Palm or Handspring Visor. Considering the game has already sucked away several hours of my time, however, I can't help but mention it.

The game puts you in control of a single character as he makes his way through a plethora of quests. What's really attractive about this game, however, is the custom modules created for it by other users. A freeware level editor lets users create everything from a sci-fi roleplaying adventure to a re-creation of the popular *Pokemon* Game Boy game. I even stumbled over a half-finished *Final Fantasy VII* parody. At last count, there are more than 30 new modules available from the game's web site (www.kpooole.com).

Granted, the overhead perspective will remind players of old *Ultima* games and turn-based combat is slightly reminiscent of the *Realms of Arkania*, but you can't beat old-school RPG goodness on a device that fits neatly into your pocket. If you have a PalmOS device and want to give the shareware version a try, check it out on this month's CD, also in the Goodies folder.

SIEGE OF AVALON

This is one of the most unusual games I've seen in a long time. The developer, Digital Tome, markets its games with the slogan, "Played Any Good Books Lately?" The company is committed to making games that put the emphasis on storytelling and character development. After installation, I ended up reading text for the next half hour. When the game finally began, I was pleasantly surprised to find that while the graphics are fairly basic, the gameplay is really something nice. The game uses a third-person isometric perspective and 2D sprites that are bright and colorful, but it also contains shadows, flickering lights, and a huge population of interactive NPCs. Some control issues need work, but the real-time fighting and attention to storytelling make it worthy of some perseverance.

Digital Tome's business model is a strange one. The company has already released Chapter One of its premier game, *Siege of Avalon*. The first chapter is about 88MB, and is available at www.siege-of-avalon.com. It contains about 20 hours of gameplay, and details the story of a young man changing the tides of a 15-year-old war. While the first chapter is free, Digital Tome plans on charging \$9.95 for each subsequent chapter (which will be considerably smaller than the first — likely around 6-10MB), for a total of six chapters in the entire game. Along with the six key chapters that continue the story, Digital Tome will release expansion chapters that will give players even more to explore.

The distribution concept is innovative, and if the game appeals to enough players, Digital Tome might have a winning strategy. With each chapter release, the programming team can update the game's engine to incorporate new features, and each chapter will merge together to become one game. Aside from *Siege of Avalon*, Digital Tome plans on releasing a new game with about 25 episodic chapters every nine months or so, with a chapter available every couple of weeks. Check out the website for more info. **PCG**



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OPINION

Flying Shrapnel

The Colonel pays a visit to a "virtual" wargame company and finds out that sometimes smaller is better.

North Carolina's Research Triangle is often referred to as "Silicon Valley East," and for good reason. Drawn by beefy tax incentives, low overheads, a relaxed Southern lifestyle, and the proximity of three world-class universities, high-tech companies large and small have flocked to the region. Twenty years ago, fly-speck towns like Apex and Cary boasted more cows than people — now there are more than 100 industrial parks covering the landscape, home to established giants such as IBM, trend-setting upstarts like Red Hat, and at least six game companies, including Red Storm, South Peak, and the New Kid on the Block, Shrapnel Games.

But no matter how diligently you search the labyrinthine web of parking lots and driveways, you will not find the headquarters of Shrapnel Games. That's because there isn't one. Shrapnel Games exists only as a concept, a "virtual company," as it were. Its full-time employees live at home and work in cyberspace, and reside in such far-flung locations as Ohio, North Dakota, Virginia, and Hawaii.

Founder and president Tim Brooks, however, does live in the Research Triangle, and when he needs "office space," he borrows a meeting room from a hugely successful young company entitled Software Completions ("You buy the code, we'll do the rest!").

On the day I met Tim Brooks at the Software Completions complex, he was

bubbling with enthusiasm about their new e-commerce solutions.

"If you look at the recent history of entertainment software," said Brooks, "you'll find a common problem with the new, smaller companies. What they really want to do is work on their projects and what they really hate are the distractions that come from manufacturing, distribution, customer service, and inventory control. Software Completions takes care of all those things, leaving us free to develop our games and interact with our customers."

By the time this column sees print, the new e-commerce system should be up and running. Every customer who orders a Shrapnel game will receive a personalized notice within 24 hours, including a UPS tracking number and a toll-free number where you can find out exactly where you game is in the pipeline. Says Brooks: "If we had to do those things ourselves, it would eat us alive, and we'd never have any time to work on the games."

Shrapnel Games officially opened for business on the Internet on July 9, 1999. Their first title was *101st Airborne* (originally published by Empire), a game designed and programmed by Tim Brooks. Next came the

highly respected *Horse and Musket*, and the download-only *Brigade Combat Team* (widely used by the professional military). Spring 2000 saw the release of *Armies of Armageddon* (a.k.a. "Wargame Development Kit 2K"), and most recently, the stunningly good *Steel Beasts*.

"We received more than 300 E-mail orders for *Steel Beasts* in the first three days it was available, and because customers

were so impressed with it, our overall sales volume tripled in August alone," says Brooks. "The thing we're proudest of, with regard to *Steel Beasts*, is the fact that a lot of real-life tankers have praised its authenticity. One Abrams' crewman remarked that the only way it could be more realistic would be for us to add the smells of cordite and engine fumes."

Second in command at Shrapnel is Richard Arnesen, who handles PR, maintains the company's website, and acts as a talent scout for new and promis-

ing games. Both Tim and Richard are palpably excited about their first sci-fi strategy game, *Space Empires IV*. I asked Richard what is so special about this conquer-the-galaxy game. He took a deep breath and rattled off just a few highlights:

"Turn-based or simultaneous play, 24-bit 3D-rendered graphics, black holes, binary stars, trinary stars, gas giants and asteroids; new and different ships and vehicles, which you can totally customize and test in a combat simulator; advanced ship commands such as Patrol, Explore, Resupply at Nearest, Repair at Nearest, Scrap, Mothball, Analyze, and Deconstruct; a huge technology tree with hundreds of levels, 500 components and 300 types of facilities; completely customizable graphics, so you can design your own planets; a vast galaxy with more than 1,500 planets; 18 unique species, also customizable; incredibly sophisticated political and diplomatic features; awesome random events such as supernovas, rebellions, and plagues...(pause for breath) ...and, oh yeah, a really fantastic AI."

Thanks, Richard. Sounds like it might be good for a bit of light diversion!

Shrapnel Games aims high — and so far, it has delivered the goods. Not a bad start for a "virtual" game company.

"One Abrams' crewman remarked that the only way [*Steel Beasts*] could be more realistic would be for us to add the smells of cordite and engine fumes."

— Tim Brooks, Shrapnel Games president

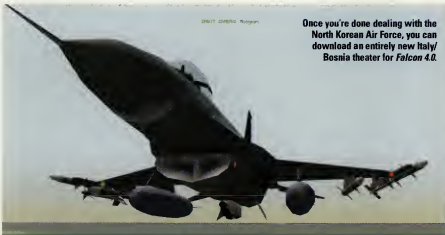


Small developers like Shrapnel Games use the Internet to sell its games, including *Steel Beasts*.



Staying Ahead of the Game

They may be a couple of years old, but community support ensures that two classic sims keep on giving.



Once you're done dealing with the North Korean Air Force, you can download an entirely new Italy/Bosnia theater for Falcon 4.0.

Papyrus' *Grand Prix Legends* and MicroProse's *Falcon 4.0* may be the graybeards of the racing and flight sim arenas (considering that they were released in 1998), but both titles still represent the state of the art for realism and authenticity in their respective gaming genres. Even more significant is the fact that both sims have yet to fulfill their overall potential in terms of functionality and gameplay depth. The elimination of the *Falcon 4.0* development team and the abysmally poor sales performance of *GPL* pretty much guarantees that we're never gonna see a *Falcon 5.0* or a *GPL 2.0* from their original developers.

So how is it then that these two aging products still manage to dominate all of their competition with sim aficionados?

An unparalleled level of enthusiast support has a lot to do with this impressive longevity. Papyrus and MicroProse released final patches for both sims in late 1999. Each went a long way toward quashing the last of the bugs and stabilizing the game code that shipped as the original release. But that was only a starting point to the amazing ride that the two sims are now enjoying.

Third-party utilities and add-ons for the games have been flying off the Web at such a prodigious rate that you will likely find yourself asking for a detailed Internet road map just to keep up with the enhancements. Ask and ye shall receive. What follows is a modest attempt to list some of the best web sites to visit if you're ready for something new.

FALCON 4.0

• **Official Patch** (<http://support.microprose.com/f4update.htm>): MicroProse's final version 1.08 patch is a must-have for everyone who owns the game. It repairs most of the bugs that shipped with the original release.

• **iBeta Realism Patch** (<http://www.ibeta.com/>): The most significant single enhancement to *Falcon 4.0* since the 1.08 patch. iBeta is a quality assurance and testing company that has almost single-handedly transformed *F4* into one of the smoothest-running combat flight sims on the market with its inventive hex-coding and "campaign bubble" repairs.

• **Italy/Bosnia Campaign** (<http://www.falcon40.com/>): Thanks to the efforts of a group of dedicated enthusiasts (who call themselves "The *F4* Terrain Team"), you can now download an entirely new theater in which to exercise your *F-16*'s air superiority. Buzz over the canals of Venice or head across the Adriatic for a deep strike mission in Bosnia. You can also download a myriad of new aircraft skins, cockpits and tactical missions.

• **F4Patch Version 2.1.1** (<http://www.bierling.net/joel/index.htm>): Rather than try to list the scores of remaining patches and enhancements that various authors have devised for *F4*, I'll instead point you in the direction of Joel Bierling's *F4Patch* site. His amazingly clever utility will allow you to orchestrate the seamless integration (and/or removal) of more than 130 individual patches and upgrades. Each and every one of these patches, from avionics

tweaks to padlocking enhancements, is incorporated into the 4.5MB download (including iBeta's Realism Patch 3.0).

GRAND PRIX LEGENDS

• **Official Patch** (<http://www.papy.com/gpl/download.html>): Papyrus' version 1.2 patch significantly upgrades *GPL*'s multiplayer, force-feedback, and graphics functionality.

• **GPL Converter** (<http://www.simgarage.co.uk/>): Dave Noonan's incredible new track conversion utility may cost \$20, but it's well worth the investment. Once installed, you can convert upward of 21 tracks from Papyrus' *ICR2/CART*, *NASCAR 2/99*, *N3*, and *NASCAR Legends* products to work with *GPL*.

• **The Pits** (<http://www.theuspits.com/owheel/gpl/index.html>): The Pits is your one-stop shopping headquarters for everything *GPL*-related. Car sets, cockpits, setups, sound effects — you name it, and it's probably here. You can even download all of Dave Noonan's superb freeware circuits (Dubai, Brands Hatch, Osterreichring, Imola, and Road Atlanta) to expand your trackside real estate.

• **GPL Rank, Worldwide Ranking and Handicapping Site** (<http://gprrank.schuermamp.de/>): See how your best lap times stack up against the rest of the world's (leave your ego at the door, because I guarantee there are better folks than you out there).

• **Virtual Racer's Online Community** (<http://gpl.gamestats.com/vroc/>): One of the finest implementations of multiplayer online racing on the 'net. All *GPL*, all the time.

• **Eagle Woman's GPL Site** (<http://www.simracing.com/~alison/gpl/>): Alison Hine is one of the most knowledgeable and respected *GPL* experts around. Her site contains an exhaustive collection of tips, setups and game-tweaking suggestions to make your *GPL* experience as fulfilling and enjoyable as possible. Her links page connects you to every *GPL*-related site of consequence on the Web.

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Drive on the famous Georgia red clay at Road Atlanta with Dave Noonan's remarkable add-on track for *GPL*.

captain's log.

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Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn

Baldur's Gate II may just be the largest RPG ever. No seriously, this game is humongous, as in Lord Humongous ruler of the wasteland humongous from *Road Warrior*. There is no way we could possibly tell you about every side quest within the folds of just one *PC Gamer* magazine, but we can detail the critical path and a few key side quests. This month we'll guide you through chapters 1 through 4 — with the rest coming to you in next month's issue. It's a long road, so let's get started.



Right from the start, you'll need to get your thief to be checking for traps in almost all of the rooms.

Jailkeep Golem

CHAPTER 1

FIRST LEVEL

■ The first chapter is a straightforward dungeon crawl. Your objective is to get the hell out of Irenicus' lair while picking up equipment for your party. Things to know before you get going — you can rest in the dungeon safely; Irenicus isn't coming back while you sleep. Also, there is no key for Minsc's cell, so you'll have to talk him out of it — don't leave him behind. Equip your party from the room to the south, and head out. Find the sewage golem. He can open up the locked doors. Talk to Rieleev and the jar people and they'll tip you off about the genie.

QUICK TIP

Don't stress about the charisma of your main character in character creation; there is a quick quest in chapter 1 that will get you a ring to raise your charisma to 18.

■ Talk to the Dryads. If you've already beat Ilyich and his boyz, you should have the acorns already. If not, you'll need to grab those. Proceed towards the room to the south, enable detect traps and enter the room. You'll set off the alarm, which will send golems after you. Clear out Irenicus' sacred room and grab the teleporter key. Head back to the locked door by the duergars and talk to the dryads, then the dryads, then the genie, and blamo — a nice new sword for your troubles!

SECOND LEVEL

■ Enter a teleporter and welcome to the second level. Here you'll meet Yoshimo. The next room is a bit strange since you have to kill the mephit generators — not the mephits. The generators yield a chunk of experience. Clear that room and the room connected to it before moving on down the hall. You should have all the keys by now. Watch for traps and head across the little bridge.

■ The next room is why you have those keys. There are lots of traps but you can disarm them. Approach along the north side and activate each column in turn. Once they are all turned off, bring in the rest of your crew. The room to the north houses a vampire. Go in and help the assassins kill her for some experience. The three hallways to the south lead to another group of duergars (closest to

■ The group of duergars past the library have got a mage, a tough guy, and a bunch of annoying shooters. Stick your toughest guy on Ilyich, your next toughest on the caster, and then divide up the rest. Quicksave in the library before you do any of this, and don't forget to grab the acorns.

■ When you make it into the sewage area and kill the Otyugh, grab the key it drops. You'll need those for the second level, and there are six in all. Head out the east door of the sewage area, and when you enter what looks like a normal room, fire up your thief's detect traps ability and have a stroll around. Notice all the glowing red boxes? A smart player calls that free experience. Make certain to grab the air elemental statue — that's the key to the door over by the duergars. It leads to a minor quest with a genie that yields a nice fat two-handed sword.



Just look at the traps in that room. You think maybe he wanted people to stay out?

You can find some hilarious D&D animated series posters inside the adventurer's mart at Waukeen's Promenade.

Another painting of a party of young adventurers from long ago... this one a diminutive barbarian. Humor has it that this barbarian had a pet unicorn smaller than he... also swallowed by Tiamat, it is presumed.

STRATEGY



the statue), a very untrustworthy guy in the middle, and assassins at the bottom. Take them in that order and don't forget to search that middle room with detect traps; there be goodies in there. Deal with the assassins, and you're home free. You won't be making a return trip to this location so grab anything else that's lying around. Exit through the back sewers to the beautiful city of Athkatla and Waukeen's promenade.

WUAKEEN'S PROMENADE

■ There is nothing much going on here. There is one quest (for a 18 charisma ring) and one tough fight. The quest is in the circus tent. Talk to the kid out front and then the guard and then head inside. Spoiler alert ahead: The answer to the riddle is, "the prince is 30 and princess is 40" (end spoiler alert!). Talk to the Ogre and the spider, kill the peasants, and then talk to the ogre again. Meet Aerle. Instead of fighting illusions for little experience, run up the stairs and force attack Kalah immediately. Once he dies and the tent comes back to normal, loot his body and talk to the ex-spider lady and go on your way. Talk to the guard outside.

■ The Den of the Seven Vales has an upstairs, and there is a party of tough guys up there ready to talk smack and pick a fight with anyone who comes up. This is going to be a difficult fight, so make sure you save before attempting it. The cheap tactic is to back down from the fight while first talking with them, and then come back and jump their asses (force attack) when they aren't expecting it. Get some serious heat on Pooky and Amon — their spells are a real pain. Also, watch out for the thief — he can do massive backstab damage. Don't send any half-orcs against Smaeluv Orslicer, since he seems to get bonuses against them. Once you've searched the rest of the promenade to your full satisfaction, hit a district exit and head to the Slums and onto chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

WHAT TO DO?

■ There are literally dozens of quests of all sizes that your party can pick up for experience, equipment and treasure. You're looking for 20,000gp (you'll only

really need 15,000). We set out on three different quests, which easily earned us the required money at least two times over. You don't have to stop there, though, because at this point the game really opens up. If you want to build up your characters, get the money to buy expensive items, and aren't in a hurry, go on as many quests as you can find.

SLAVER QUEST

■ Head into the Copper Coronet where there are some NPCs to pick up if you need them. Korgan is chaotic evil so think a bit before letting that jerk into your party. Nalia is also in the Copper Coronet and will ask for your assistance. You can have her not join your party and still do her quest if you want. Once you're done with her, talk to the guy behind the bar named Lehtinan. Tell him you want to see the "other" types of entertainment available. He'll open up the back rooms for you and you'll be able to hang out with the prostitutes or go and watch the fights. The gladiator area is where the quest is located. They've got slaves fighting in pits, and, of course, as a good guy, you aren't

Attack the golems one at a time, and it'll be an easier fight.



going to stand for that, are you? Head back down the hallway and enter the rear of the slave pen area. Wax the chumps you find here and talk to Hendak. Save your game at this point. Then, find the way back toward the gladiator area and the beastmaster. Lead him and the other beasts out of that hallway and fight them where there is more room to maneuver. Grab the key from him once he's dispatched and go back to the slaver area and free Hendak. Follow him and take out the weak guards. Hendak will kill Lehtinan. He'll also tell you about the Slaver HQ.

SLAVER SEWERS AND HQ

The best way to get there is to head into the sewers via the Copper Coronet, rather than taking the front entrance out in the Slums. Why's this? Because you can get a +3 two-handed sword and a nice chunk of experience down there,

that's why! You'll need to grab four items if you take this route: Vallah's Hand (sewer grate in jelly room), Lover's Ring (skeletons on the wall), Shaman's Staff (Kobolds), and Blood of Quallo's Friend (kill the bum's pet). Talk to Quallo and head to the sewer pipe room. Put all the pieces on one character and have that character activate the pipes. Moving from left to right, the order is: 3, 1, 2, and 4. Bingo! Nice sword! Find the stairs going up, but prepare yourself for a serious battle once you make it to the top. You'll need a way to do fire or acid damage because there is a troll in the next area. The HQ is pretty straightforward — simply put, kill everything that's not a child. Clear the level completely, rescue the children, and be a nice guy. Once you've cleared the level go talk to Hendak for a reward. Save the game and sell any extra loot. The next quest will have you fighting a lot of trolls so

figure out ways to do fire or acid damage. You'll get 20 fire arrows for free at the de'Arnise Hold, but you'll probably need more. Head for the City Gates, then go to the de'Arnise Hold.

DE'ARNISE HOLD

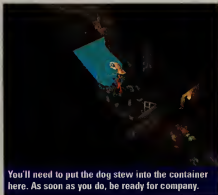
- Nalia was yapping back at the Copper Coronet about trolls taking over her castle. Go find the wooden stockade on the west part of the map and talk to the folks there. You can sleep safely in the stockade if you need to rest during this quest. Head into the castle from the secret passage just across from the stockade and clear the bottom level. There are two things you want to do on the bottom level. First, discover the hidden area with the magic forge and the first head of the flail. Second, go out front and kill the guard dogs for their meat and then make stew with the meat in the kitchen.
- Go up to the second level and locate the hidden areas. You'll need to scout around a bit to find them all. You'll find the key to the keep in the library. Back in a very hidden room behind a trapped door, you'll find Glacias. He seems to be under some sort of mind control, but there isn't anything you can do so just kill him. Next, find Lady Delcia's room. You'll find a back room with a bunch of golems and a ladder heading down. If you grab anything from the statues besides the flail head, the golems will attack. Go on the offensive and attack them first, one at a time. If you complete this quest now, you can put together the entire Flail of the Age before getting into some heavy fighting in the next area.
- Go downstairs. A few rooms in, you'll run into a group of umber hulks. These guys are really nasty, hitting you with a confusion attack that just plain sucks. You can, however, avoid the fight by sneaking past them into the lower dungeon area and placing the dog stew into the part of the wall that has dog bones in it. The moment you do this, the Hulks will start moving back toward that



Pull the animals and the Beastmaster out for a tactical advantage in this fight.



You always need fire or acid to kill a troll, otherwise they'll regenerate and you'll be in trouble.



You'll need to put the dog stew into the container here. As soon as you do, be ready for company.

room, so you need to haul ass out of there. The best way to do this is with improved invisibility. Once they are out of the way, head into their room with your party, shut the dungeon door, and enter the door to the north. Fight the trolls there and grab the treasure in the statue. Once you've cleared the castle, go back and tell Nalia what you've done. You'll get a big experience boost, and if your main character is a fighter, the opportunity to become the lord of the keep. If you've done both these quests, you will probably have enough money to advance to chapter 3, but if you've got the time and inclination, check out some of the other quests.

SLAYING THE DRAGONS

WINDSPEAR HILLS

- Talk to a guy named Lord Jerdan Firakraag in the Copper Coronet. He'll hire you to clear out some trolls for 10,000gp. You should know before you start this quest that it's going to be the toughest one thus far. You'll be fighting greater wolfweres, an adamantite golem, djinnis, a beholder, a fire elemental, and conclude with a red dragon. It's one hell of a quest — both



Negative Plain protection can help stop the vampires. Use summoned attackers on the front lines.

in difficulty and reward — the biggest prize being the Holy Avenger itself, the legendary +5 two-handed sword.

- Going to the Windspear Hills will throw you into the life of a guy named Garren, who, it turns out, has been screwed over by Firakraag. In fact, Garren's daughter will be kidnapped right under your nose. You'll find Firakraag's dungeon to the northeast. On your way, hit the Dryad area to the far east and you'll have a chance to get rid of some acorns while accruing some experience in the process. Once inside the dungeon, clear out the top level, making sure to watch out for the transmuter. Those kobolds



I dub thee, Dead Dragon Bitch! You don't have to kill any of the dragons, but it's a great challenge.

- of his explode like fireballs, so shoot from a distance. An annoying group of orcs will respawn every time you leave to rest but they are rather wimpy, so don't worry too much.
- The second level leads right into an ambush. Have your thief unlock the side doors and kill the annoying archers. Off to the east you'll come across a room chock full of nasty vampires. Clear them out and continue east. You'll eventually come to a room full of wraiths. Grab the chapel key under a board. Head back west and you'll run into Semia. She wants you to go into the chapel and grab stuff for her. We

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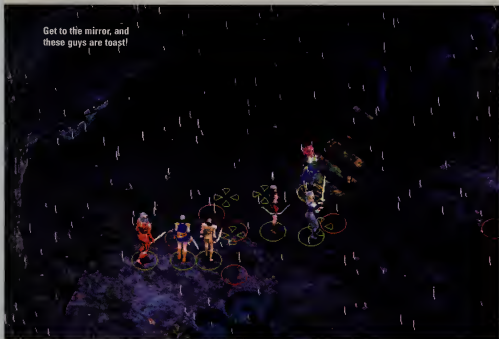
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suggest doing this because you'll get some good dragon hunting equipment in the process. You need to kill the djinnis, so grab all the pieces of the mask, and then put it on your lead character and fight the fire elemental. But wait! Don't grab the treasure yet. Instead, go back and heal up, rest, and memorize spells; the fight with Semia is going to be tough, and as soon as you grab the treasure, she and her nefarious crew will warp in to get ya! Finish those losers off once you're ready and then continue on into the dungeon.

- There are two more tough spots before the real battle. A group of golems is guarding some treasure toward the back, but you can pull the two small ones out of the hole and bash them separately before dealing with the big golem. The last group of baddies is down in the jail area where you'll find the daughter. These guys will be pretty quick work. Save here, because things are about to get real tough. Go down to

the third level of the dungeon and speak with the dragon. He'll send you back up to do battle with his mage boy. The key to defeating the mage boy is using lots of magic to dispel his protections. Once you've done that, he'll be as weak as a little girl. Kill him, release the daughter, and get ready to make a choice.

- If you go back now, you'll get experience for finishing the quest, but not as much as you'll get from killing the dragon. Killing dragons is almost the hardest thing to do in the game, but it can be done. Just remember to save before you attempt it because you'll definitely reload a few times before getting the job done. Your best chance of success is to ambush him while he's blue. Use magic to lower his resistance and to remove his protections. Also, use summoned creatures and ranged weapons. As weak as they are, pounding him with magic missiles can really help you here. Once you've killed him, go back to Garren for a ton of experience.

UMAR HILLS

- Sending one dragon to the grave not enough to satisfy your blood lust? If you've talked to a kid at the City Gates named Delon, he'll tell you about his troubled village in the Umar Hills. Before you leave the city gates, head inside the Inn where you'll find a secret door that leads to a lich lair. Dust the fool for a nice long sword. Upon arrival in Umar, you'll find a bunch of people talking about village happenings. Ask around, talk to the merchants, and get some sleep in the inn. There are some quick and easy quests here that you might want to embark on. Make certain to talk to Jermien and the Mayor and then head north and talk to the ogres. Next, check out the ranger cabin. Eventually, you'll need to head to the Temple Ruins area.
- Upon coming to the Ruins area, you'll see a woman running away. Chase her into the cave and talk to her. You can kill her or you can let her help you out. Pick which one you'd rather do and then leave the cave and head due east until you hit the ruins. You'll need to find the mirror just north of the fountain and turn it on. If you have a high level cleric or paladin, activate his turn undead ability and you'll be killing the shadow wolves almost as fast as the mirror. The turn undead ability will be very handy throughout this quest. Head down into the dungeon.

SHADOW LORD DUNGEON

- There are a couple of different puzzles down here that need to be taken care of, but beyond that it's a pretty straightforward level. Head through the door (it's the only one there), and grab the pile of bones. In the next room you'll need to kill the Shadow Jailor and get his key to let Mazzie out of the cell. To the west you'll find a head to a large statue. The transcriptions of the rituals are as follows: Morning Ritual — Prayer, Book, and Reflect. Noontide — Hymn, Hands, Rejoice. Dusk — Recite, Children.



Onslaught. Your reward will be mucho experience and one part of the Symbol of Amunator. Head back into the jail room and go south to enter the room with the shiny crystal. Don't pull it out immediately. Instead, let it finish off the onslaught of shadows first. Next, grab the Sun Gem and it will allow you to get past the barrier at the end of the hallway. Open the barrier, head down the hall, and take the first right.

- Go across the bridge and head through the lava room. If you have the bones, give them to the ghosts in the south room. Don't use Turn Undead here or else you'll kill Amuana. You'll get a Shadow Dragon Wardstone that will allow you to walk past the dragon without him seeing your party, so you can sneak up on him for an attack. Head down the hall and take the first right. Clear out the undead and prep one character to cross the letter puzzle. Step across the letters that spell A-M-U-N-A-T-O-R, starting at the "A" on the far right. After clearing out that area, you should have all three pieces of the amulet and a Sun Gem. Use them to knock down the barrier at the end of the hall. Save here if you are going to kill the dragon because he is just below. You can sneak past him with the wardstone.

- This dragon's biggest trick is using a spell of protection against magical weapons. If you have something ready to pierce that protection, he shouldn't be any harder than the red dragon. Pound him with magic missiles along with a few melee attackers and ranged weapons and he'll fall.
- Head up the alternate stairs and you'll fight the Shadow Lord. When the battle begins, attack the Shadow Altar with your melee guys and use a few of the ranged folks on the Shadow Lord to limit his spellcasting. Once the altar falls, everyone should hit the Shadow Lord. This will be a breeze compared to the dragon. Once he is dead and the sunlight returns, head back to the town of Umar and talk to the Mayor.

CHAPTER 3

- If you are in town with 15k or more, you'll be approached by a woman named Valen. She is working with the guild warring with the shadow thieves and wants you to meet the mistress in the graveyard. You can choose whom you want to side with at this point — the vampire rebels or the established shadow thieves. Siding with Bhodi is great for evil parties, and most good



Sheesh, these thieves over do it a bit don't they?

guys will want to go with the shadow thieves. Go to Galen, pay the cash and he'll send you to the docks to meet Aran Linvail. He is downstairs in a secret room within the real guildhall. He needs you to solve some of his problems.

THE DOCKS AND BRIDGE DISTRICT

- Wait until night and then go down the steps that lead to the water. Find Mook and play out that little dance. Kill the vampire and report to Aran. Go to the Bridge district and head up to the second floor of the Five Flagons Inn. The two thieves will be in the last room on the left. Talk to them, whack 'em, but get the name of the contact first. When

Dead Dragon
Number Two!
Deathkillaz!!





Tanova's spells can be really nasty, so just keep pounding on her. Don't go into the spike room — it's a death trap.

the contact shows, talk with him and get him to spill the beans, then whoop up on him as well. You can head back to Aran at this point, but if you've been approached by Lt. Aegisfield about murders, take five minutes to complete his quest while you're here. Talk to the bum Rampuh and Rose Bouquet and they'll point you in the right direction. Once back to Aran, you'll get another experience point boost and receive info on the last quest in chapter 3.

- Now, head into the graveyard district. There are plenty of graves to defile (if that's your thing) and a few minor quests. Eventually, you'll head down into the tombs underneath and begin the quest to destroy the vampires. Keep your

thief detecting traps around here because there are some rather nasty ones around. The first big opponent you'll likely run into is the spider lady, Pai'Na. She is in the main spider room along with a ton of little spiders. After defeating her, you'll get the spider figurine and a very handy little summon creature item. There are a few side rooms around here, with the most dangerous being the room with the mural on the floor. Watch out for the traps there.

- Once you find the mage who's ready to open the doors, you'll know that you're in the right area. Inside the inner sanctum of the vampires, the first tough fight will be with Tanova, a nasty spellcaster. Time to use that spider figurine you just

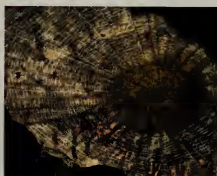
acquired. Dispel her magic protections and kill her ass cold. If you find the coffins before you head down to the deeper level, stake those you can and then go find Lassal. Clear out all the vampire chumps, and then he'll warp up into the spike room. This room is tough, so use just one character to pull Lassal to you, instead of fighting on his turf. Kill him, then spike his coffin. As soon as you do, Bhodi will show up. Talk with her, then fight. Go back to Aran when you're done. He'll want you to leave immediately, but you can choose to hang around a bit and deal with other things if you'd like. Don't worry, that captain isn't going anywhere. Once you're ready, return to him and start chapter 4.



Do you want to go for more loot or head out on more quests? It's up to you in the graveyard.



This is the most dangerous room in the skinner quest, so watch out!



The spider lady is surrounded by her spider-ettes. Kill her, then take the spider figurine.



Once you have collected the items from the chest, put them in the statues, starting here.



Activate the portal with three stones, three monsters, and one nice set of armor.



Each page leads to more experience and a harder fight with the monsters that are spawned.

CHAPTER 4

BRYNLAW

- You've only got a couple of things to do in town. Head to the Vulgar Monkey and talk to Sanik. He'll send you on a quest to find his wife, who is captive in Lady Galvena's Feshall. There is a way to sneak into the place, which you can discover by talking to the woman out front. If you prefer the direct approach, just bust in and kill anyone that attacks you. Head into the basement, kill the guards, and get the key for the doorway at the end of the hall. You'll end up fighting (killing) Lady Galvena and her mage boy. Rescue the girl, and you'll find out how to get into the Asylum. If you've got good charisma (and you should if you did the circus tent quest from chapter 1), you'll be able to talk yourself into the Asylum at the Pirate Lord's house; his place is to the west.

THE ASYLUM

- You've got a little time to run around the Asylum before starting a new cinematic sequence. You'll find yourself in a dream sequence that represents Candlekeep. The sequence itself is mostly storytelling, the bad part being the cost of opening the door to the keep. Choose wisely — you're going to lose a point in whichever attribute you chose. Talk to Imoen, grab Bhaal from outside, and defeat him within the keep. Eventually, you'll find yourself inside the Asylum Dungeon with Bhodi talking to you and Imoen there ready to join your party if you want.

THE ASYLUM DUNGEON

- This dungeon is full of puzzles designed to "test your sanity." Head up the west stairs to the hidden door to the right. Kill the mutated gibberlings and grab the ruby stone in the carpet. Head down the hall and enter the door on the left. You'll need to grab the stuff in the chest and put it into the appropriate statue. Moving clockwise, the order is: Skull,

Hourglass, Mirror, Head, Sword Medallion, Sun Medallion, Sundial, Flask of Water, Boots, Gold Circle, Star Medallion. Head down the hall. You'll notice that it splits. If you go to the left you'll enter a room with Mephits and Ruhk — kill them. Don't activate the portal yet. Instead, head back out and up to the room with the heads. Starting with the one on the outside left, then continuing around in a circle, the solutions are: Ice, Fire, Coffin, Candle, Darkness, Stars, Hole, Secret, Fish, Breath, Sponge, Shadows. The ring you get from this puzzle is fantastic. Head back to the main area and head up the northern stairs where you'll come to a door. Open it, and take out the Clay Golem. Remember that you'll need blunt weapons. Inside you'll find a Bag of Holding, one of the best artifacts in the

game. You'll also now have the final stone for the earlier portal puzzle. Go back and finish that, then head back to the northern hallway and go east through the stairs.

- Go down the stairs and into the room with the book. Every time you click on the book another monster will appear for the slaughter. The final monster is a beholder — so be ready. And watch out for that petrification spell! In that same room you'll find a hidden door. Enter it and start killing the multitude of low-level scrubs. Clear out that entire area, making sure to grab the wooden stake and crystal shard. Go back to the room with the book and exit through the east door. Run down that hallway and continue past the "T." Enter the library and scrounge for gold. Then, walk down the hall and find Dace Sontan. Whack him, stake the



In the asylum dungeon, start here and go in a circle. Don't get your hand caught!



Lonk the Sane- Worth to me? How much is a life going for these days? That new director Irenicus would have me quartered in his experiments. He's done it before.

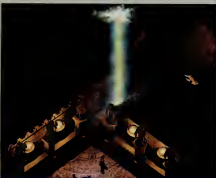
- 1:- Then die at my hand instead of his!
 2:- You only follow him out of fear. I'll destroy him with the help of the inmates.
 3:- I'll offer you 200 gold to help me.
 4:- How about 2000 gold. Is that worth it?



coffin, and grab his hand. You should have the crystal and Dace's hand at this point. Go back to the main room. Beware! If you take the side hallway you'll run into a battle with some ultra annoying umber hulks. Go up the southern staircase and the statue there will give you access to the second level of the dungeon.

THE ASYLUM DUNGEON SECOND LEVEL

■ The second level is as puzzle-rific as the first. Yay! Go through the door on the left (south). You'll quickly come to a room with two hidden doors. One can be unlocked, and within you'll find a horseshoe-looking device. When it's activated it will open the other hidden door and some trolls will saunter out at



Beware the child of bhaal — he kicks serious ass!

you. Kill them and then make your way down the hall to the minotaur room. Clear those chumps out and then save your game. Inside the little connected room you'll find a pool and a few statues. They are trapped, and your thief won't be able to do anything about it. Use someone with a lot of health to clear out that area. For your trouble, you'll get a minotaur horn and four paintings. Continue through the south door and make the turn to the left.

- You'll come to a room with statues on the wall. Keep the rest of your party back and move forward with your lead character. Once he gets past the cinematic, back the rest of your party away. In that state, your main character will attack anyone. You'll not be able to rest in the dungeon now without a reversion to the child of Bhaal. Move down the hall and you'll come to a room with a big minotaur statue. To the south you'll find another room full of minotaurs and the second minotaur horn. If you go back to the statue, you can open the door and exit if you wish. Exiting will take you through a series of tests. If you're not ready to go yet, explore the rest of this dungeon and gather all the treasure you can find.
- Before you go into the exit, save your game; there are many different options to the tests you'll face ahead. Here is the

one we chose: Upon entering the test area, kill the little guys until the apparition shows up. Tell him you'll do what it takes to hurry the process along. Enter the room with mushrooms and kill them all. The answer to the problem is "a splinter." In the next room, grab the cloak from the table then talk to the weirdos there. The correct answers are: Nothing, River, Fear, and Memory. In the next room you'll kill a few trolls. For a nice club, put the troll head into the altar. Go to the judgment and you'll be rewarded. Upon getting back to the asylum, you'll talk to that backstabber captain. Listen to what he has to say and then go upstairs. Lonk the Sane will catch you, but since money shouldn't be a problem, bribe him for 2,000gp. He'll give you the keys and you'll end up with the crazies. Talk them into a fight, and the next thing you know, you'll be facing the head honcho himself: Irenicus. When you fight, hit him with everything you've got: every spell, every magic weapon, everything you've got that does damage. Most likely it will be an easy fight and he'll run like a coward. Wipe out the murderers that spawn in and have a stroll around the asylum. You'll need to decide whether to take the portal to Underdark or go with the captain. We'll deal with that decision in next month's conclusion to our epic *Baldur's Gate II* strategy.

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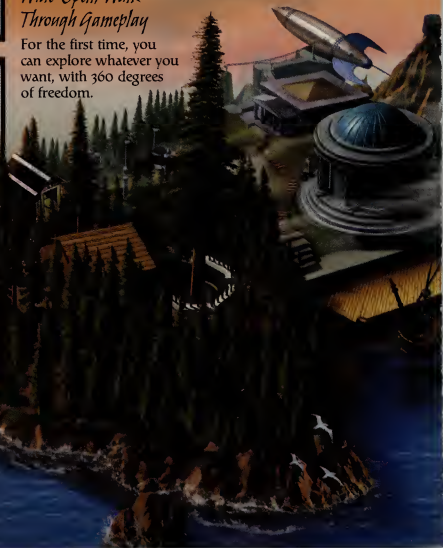
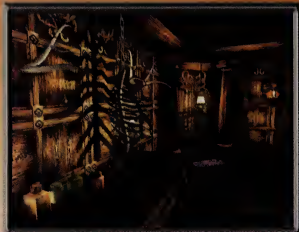
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Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force

Pity the poor Star Trek red shirts. Like mice, Pokemon, and online games sites, those away team suckers are a dime-a-dozen. But in Raven's brilliant *Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force*, you finally get a chance to kick butt Federation-style with our complete walkthrough. Oh, and see if you can find all 12 original Star Trek episode titles (you know...from the days of Kirk and Spock), then send a list of them to editor@pcgamer.com by Dec. 31, 2000. One lucky gamer will win a copy of *Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force*. Make it so!



Shoot the energy distribution nodes to knock out the Borg's power supply.

- To de-couple the dilithium matrix, activate two panels on the lower floor and one on the upper floor.
- When you face the enemy within Voyager on deck 8, shoot the nearby barrels to make them explode and get behind the invaders as soon as you can. The plasma fodder often beam in facing the rest of the Voyager crew, allowing you to shoot them gallantly in the back.

DATA RETRIEVAL

After you beam over the alien vessel, you will be attacked by what look like oversized moths called Ethernians.

- Don't waste ammo by using the alt-fire on your enemies; a couple of shots with the rifle will do the trick.
- On the floor and walls are "generation pods." Shoot these first so that more enemies don't teleport in.
- Don't forget to grab the stasis weapon after you meet up with Foster. With the alt-fire, its broad patterns of force can take out several enemies at once.
- In one instance Teisia is killed when she walks on to an electrified field. Whenever you see that field again, simply look for a nearby energy source and shoot it.
- At the end of the level you'll find a broken transporter. Guide the "fireflies" to the transporter by shooting nearby terminals, forcing them to move to each successive breakage and fix the damage.

PROLOGUE

The game begins in a Borg cube. You'll soon find out why your teammates don't seem to take the adventure as seriously as you do.

- Use the alt-fire on the compression rifle early in the level. It eliminates Borg quickly, but they soon adapt to it.
- Shoot the plasma filters to either blow Borgs into smithereens, or to open up metal panels.
- During one scene, you'll have to step on sliding green brackets to move across a broken catwalk. Use the brackets to move up; walk across the grating; then use the brackets to move back down and continue on.
- During that same scene, keep an eye out for a health node that is only accessible by riding a bracket to the top.

UNAVOIDABLE DELAYS

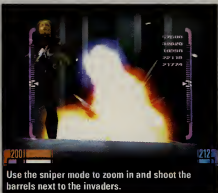
Once you are back aboard the Voyager, things get hairy in a hurry. Just hit the "tab" key to bring up your current orders.

- Speak to everyone you come across to get more information on your status.

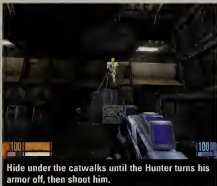
- The scripted scenes can be changed if you act quickly enough. Hitting panels and throwing switches can save the lives of your crewmates.
- Crawl through the Jefferies tubes to unlock the crawl shaft to deck 10
- Take the shaft down to deck 10. In the room with the radioactive water, there is a ladder on the far wall. Use the fallen grates and boxes to climb to the latter, press the panel and drain the fluid.



Shoot these energy pods to disable the lethal electrical field you'll encounter.



Use the sniper mode to zoom in and shoot the barrels next to the invaders.



Hide under the catwalks until the Hunter turns his armor off, then shoot him.

DANGEROUS GROUND

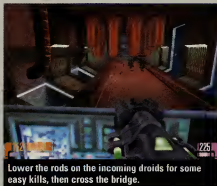
Thanks to the info from the Etherians, you now have to retrieve isodesium from the Scavengers while on a stealth mission. You also go through the mirror, mirror in one clever reference to a classic *Trek* episode.

- Despite what Foster says, the level plays out nearly the same whether you sneak around or go in with phasers blazing.
- If you do start a private little war, use the phaser occasionally to conserve ammo.
- If you do use stealth, however, the alt-fire on the compression rifle is the most powerful and silent weapon.
- It is possible to finish the level without collecting all of the isodesium.
- The first isodesium is found above the dining hall with the Klingons.
- The second isodesium is found in a ventilation shaft.
- The third isodesium is in the room with the bickering Klingons and Maalons.
- The quietest way to free Telsia is to apply the tranquilizer to the doctor.
- When facing the Hunter, hit him once then hide, as he is almost invulnerable with his armor on; also, he cannot shoot through the catwalk, so hide underneath him to avoid fire.

PROVING GROUND

Those pesky Borg are at it again. They've captured Foster and your isodesium, so it's up to you to get them both back.

- It is possible either to save Foster or let him be assimilated. To go on an errand of mercy, use the lifts opposite his holding cell to go up one level, cross over, and then free him.
- All of the force fields have generators nearby. Some require a phaser blast to destroy, while others need a grenade.
- If you save Foster, Seven-of-Nine will become a wolf in the fold, but if Foster is assimilated, he will be the Borg voice.
- Your comrades seem to be made of sterner stuff than you are. They never use the healing or energy nodes, so feel free to cover behind them and let them take the brunt of the Borg's onslaught.



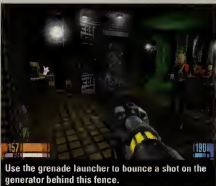
Lower the rods on the incoming droids for some easy kills, then cross the bridge.

- The Borg will eventually adapt to your standard weapons, leaving you with only the I-mod. Use the I-mod's alt-fire to kill Borg with one shot or you'll be assimilated in the wink of an eye.

THE BREACH

With the Harvesters on the way, Cpt. Janeway has no choice but to send the away team to a derelict ship in the hope that its huge cannon can stop the invaders.

- To get to the computer on the second level of the hanger, use the crates to jump to the ledges on the wall.
- Don't underestimate the alternative factor: The alt-fire on the Tetryon Disruptor is a powerful and efficient way to silence the security droids.
- To get past the debris in the hallway, look for some crates in front of a ventilation shaft. Use the shaft to get into the laser room. Then use the four panels behind the laser to point it at the chair in front of the door. Use the control panel to the right of the laser to blast the chair.



Use the grenade launcher to bounce a shot on the generator behind this fence.

- Just like on the Borg cube, you can hide like a ninny behind your crewmen, who seem to be invulnerable.
- Use the panel on the construction vehicle to cause it to run into the catwalk's support, bringing it crashing down.
- To turn off the venting gas, look for a ventilation shaft near the lift. Destroy the boiler on the far right.
- After raising the rods in front of the cooling chamber, wait a second for the security droids to walk underneath them, and then lower the rods for some easy kills. After the droids have exploded, raise the rods again.

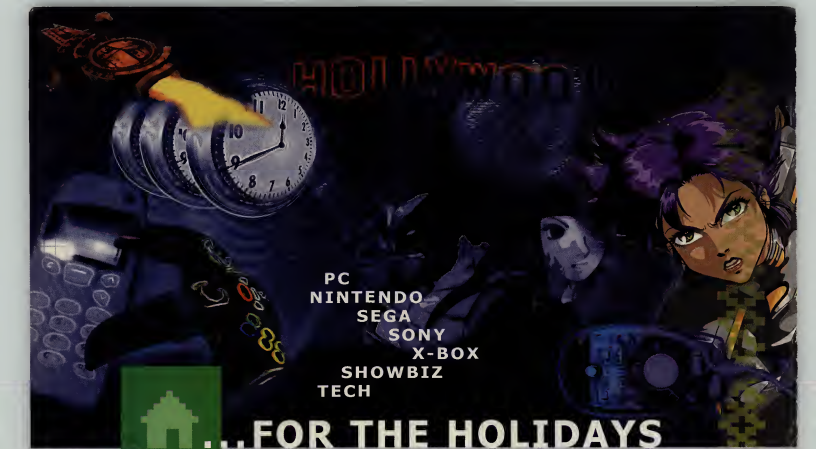
INVASION

The shot fired at the Harvester ship only disabled it. Now its unhappy passengers are spilling aboard the Voyager. Get out there and stop them.

- Gear up in the equipment room, and be sure to visit the Doc for some health.
- The alt-fire on the dreadnaught weapon can take out a few Harvesters with a



Use the dreadnaught's alt-fire to sweep out the garbage.



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single blast. Just point it at the floor a few feet in front of them. That way it will arc across the floor and kill most anything in its path.

- When you move into the hanger, the catwalk will give way beneath you, but it is possible to back up to the door behind you and not fall in. Biesman shows up looking for a piece of the action, but there are tons of Harvesters. Eventually, you'll have to take the personal elevator next to him.

EXTERNAL STIMULI

Having survived the attack by the Harvesters, Munro suggests they use the ship as a Trojan horse to take the offensive against The Forge.

- Before the invasion, you'll have to do a little space walking. Use your sniper scope and the alt-fire on the compression rifle to sweep away the Harvesters before you begin.
- The dreadnaught weapon is the most effective tool against the Harvesters.
- To get through the red force fields, wait for the stolen goods to pass through, and then run when the force fields are down.
- Whenever numerous Harvesters attack you, point the dreadnaught at the floor in front of them and use the alt-fire. The electrical pulse will travel along the floor, usually killing two or three at a time.
- It doesn't take Spock's brain to realize that to cross the enormous gap on the way to the generator, you'll need to uncover the invisible panels. Conserve ammo by using the phaser to reveal the hidden floor. Start just right of center and shoot down the shaft, eventually panels will become visible for a few seconds, allowing you to cross over.
- Reavers are simply Harvesters with more powerful distance attacks. Use the dreadnaught or the alt-fire on the compression rifle to deal with them.
- To destroy the generator creating the dampening field, look for four energy outlets providing power streams to the



core. Simply shoot those outlets and you'll be on your way.

COMMAND DECISION

Once you have destroyed the generator creating the dampening field, it's time to find the bad guy who is responsible for the balance of terror.

- To destroy the seed and beat the Vohrsoth you'll need to complete two stages. First, kill a few Harvesters and Reavers in the central chamber. Alt-fire on the dreadnaught is the easiest way to take out large groups of enemies without hurting yourself.
- Finally, to beat the Vohrsoth itself, you have to pour massive amounts of damage into it. The amount of damage you have to do is dependent on your difficulty setting. The easiest way is to circle strafe back and forth while pummeling it with photon torpedoes. When you run out of torpedoes, use the dreadnaught. **PCG**



Use the phaser to reveal the hidden panels.



Four quick shots and that dampening field is down.

OUR PRIME DIRECTIVE



There are lots of reasons to think that Kirk was the best captain. He killed alien overlords, he seduced their women, he kicked Apollo's butt — and he cheated! As we learned in *The Wrath of Khan*, Kirk cheated during a Starfleet Academy training scenario and got a commendation for original thinking. We suggest you do the same. Here are some easy-to-remember cheat codes that will get you out of any situation. To use the cheats, hit the **-** key to get the console menu, type in the cheat code, and hit enter.

give armor
give ammo
give health
give all
give weapons
god

Warning! These cheats can only be used "in the game," so using them on the holodeck is not only impossible, but once you have tried to use a cheat on the holodeck you will not be able to use them throughout the rest of *Elite Force* unless you quit and restart the game.

W

e know that the life of a gamer can be hard — sneaking time to play on the office LAN, playing after the kids are in bed. We feel your pain, and we can help. Share your love for gaming with us.

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KOREANS SURE LOVE THEM CHEETOS

I think it's cool that in Korea they love *StarCraft* so much that they even have *StarCraft* characters on bags of Cheetos. I just reinstalled *StarCraft* on my hard drive after a long absence and have been playing it for weeks on end. I love the smell of Zerg in the morning.

— Jeff Eskew, via the Internet

Mmm, roasted Zerg...

ARE PC GAMES DOOMED?

When I read your "State of the PC Union" article, I thought it was well thought out and very well written. The most important point you made, in my opinion, was about how the Japanese have elevated comic books into the realm of the mainstream by creating comics for everyone, leaving no one out. As important a point as this may be, however, it was hypocrisy coming from PC Gamer. While I'd agree that the games industry is in desperate need of diversification, who are you to talk when your very own magazine is inappropriate for one of the largest groups of gamers out there — children? How will PC games ever cease being viewed by the mainstream public as merely a "nerd's hobby" if you publish a magazine that, while being the best selling in the world, is only catering to "hardcore" gamers? I am not asking that you review Barbie games, but perhaps you would be doing yourselves and the



Thanks for the letter, Ano — we agree that *Half-Life* is a good game! You sure are a sharp fellow!

industry a favor if you would leave out references to pornography, and made an effort to discourage graphic violence. If every game worth playing is too gory for most people, and every magazine worth reading is inappropriate for anyone under the age of fifteen, I believe that PC games are truly doomed.

— Name withheld, via the Internet

YES, IT IS

Half-Life is a good game.

— Ano Nomous, via the Internet

Ah...now there's a letter we can't argue with!

WINNER OF THE "MOST MISPLACED E-MAIL OF THE MONTH" AWARD

I was an avid Sega fan. I have many classic systems including all of Sega's. All of them work great — except for my Dreamcast. After seven months of use it has suddenly stopped working! It was not dropped, it was not kicked, it was not slammed or damaged in any way. It simply stopped functioning. Understanding technology (I'm a computer technician), I know things break down.

So, unfazed, I recently called Sega for help, expecting a quick, free solution. Their response: "After 6 months, you must pay \$70 for the repair — shipping not included." I am so disappointed in Sega. I feel as if I've wasted my hard earned money on their system, games, and accessories. I was an avid Sega fan, but I'm not anymore.

— "Doc Is In," via the Internet



StarCraft is one of the best games ever, and the devoted Korean fans have inspired at least one PCG reader to start playing again.

Dan Morris, author of "State of the PC Union" responds: *Hypocrisy? We don't think so. We don't write for children, you're right. We publish a magazine for grown-ups, and we cover whichever games are big that month — be they violent, funny, amative, or anything else. We truly are a diverse and eclectic magazine, and to be anything less than ourselves would be the true hypocrisy.*

Greg Vederman responds to Dan Morris's response: *Dan, must you always wax poetic? Man, what a doofus.*



Our man Li is still playing *Unreal Tournament*, and that's fine by PCG reader Sean Lambert.

That should teach you to buy PC, love PC, live PC. We've passed your E-mail along to Better Homes and Gardens.com for further feedback.

O ENGINE, MY ENGINE

Your article "Got a License for That?" in the October 2000 issue raises some interesting questions. Mark Rein claims that engine licensing helps reduce production time for games. However, at least one game that I can think of that used (and later switched) engines — *Duke Nukem Forever* — seems to be in a semi-permanent holding pattern. *Daikatana*, too, took years to come out despite its licensed engine technology. So, what's the real deal here? Do you guys think it really saves time to license an engine?

— Josh Criz, via the Internet

It's entirely dependent on the game and the developer. Most games with licensed engine technology do seem to come out quicker, though. Some recent titles that come to mind are

Kiss: Psycho Circus (LithTech), Klingon Honor Guard (Unreal, sadly), and Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force (Quake III).

A LETTER TO ASSOCIATE EDITOR LI KUO

I just received my November Issue and was shocked to read that Li is the only person at PCG still playing *Unreal Tournament*. The rest of you editors have no heart! Clearly, *UT* is the best FPS currently on the market. Don't let those silly *Quake*-heads taint you, Li! You and I know that *Quake III* is just mindless drivel. Keep up the good work, Mr. Kuo, and keep the *UT* faith alive and well!

— Sean Lambert, via the Internet

We'd let Li respond, Sean, but he's rather busy at the moment. You see, he's been playing Quake III for some time, and spending too much time with the Quake III-powered Elite Force! Rest assured, Li will convert to the dark side! Muhahaha!

PCG

BECOME ONE WITH YOUR INNER NERD



In your preview of BioWare's forthcoming *Star Wars* RPG, you said that it would be the first *Star Wars* roleplaying game. In point of fact, it's only the first "computer-based" RPG set in the universe. West End Games created the first *Star Wars* RPG back in 1987 and all you needed to play it was a pencil, paper, and some dice.

— Name withheld, via the Internet

Well, in the movie Jerry Maguire, Raymond (the little boy) tells us that the human head weighs eight pounds, but do you know how much the brain itself weighs? Didn't think so! For your information, the human brain weighs a mere three pounds. Now that that is all settled, do yourself a favor and get a date!

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3dfx Interactive	Voodoo 5	169, 171, 173, 190-191	Havas Interactive	Homeworld Cataclysm	122-123
Aberdeen	Hardware	255	Havas Interactive	Arcanum	130-131
Activision	Call to Power 2	32-33	Hypersonic Gaming PCs	Hardware	197
AlienWare PC Systems	Gaming Systems	194-195	InfoBank	Deep Raider	102
Amazon.com	www.amazon.com	57	Infogrames	Unreal Tournament	132-133
American Inst. for Computer Science	Distance Education	253	Infogrames	Dirt Track Racing - Sprint Car	83
ACOpen	Hardware	187	Interact Accessories	Interact PC Line	118
Art Institutes Intl.	Education	252	Interplay	Fallout Tactics	50
ATI Technologies, Inc.	Radeon	196	Interplay	Star Peace	105
Babbages Etc.	www.gamestop.com	175-184	Interplay	Icewind Dale	210-211
Best Buy Co., Inc.	Best Buy	224-225	Interplay	Baldur's Gate	10-11
Bethesda Softworks	Sea Dogs	84	Interplay	Giants: Citizens Kabuto	149-155
Blue Byte Software	Battle Isle: The Andosia War	107	Interplay	Sacrifice	200-205
Blue Byte Software	Settlers IV	109	Interplay	SFC 2	222-223
Boston Acoustics	PlayStation 2 Speakers	52	Klipsch	Klipsch Promedia Speakers	39
Boston Acoustics	Speakers	186	Logitech	Wingman Joystick	31
Chips & Bits	Software Direct	248-249	LucasArts	Escape from Monkey Island	26-27
Compact Media	Software Direct	253	Mattel Interactive	Pool of Radiance	46
Consumer Review	www.pcg.com	237	Mattel Interactive	Sega Rally 2	58-59
Creative Labs	Audio Enhancement Technology	136	Mattel Interactive	Hot Wheels - Williams F1 Team	164-165
Creative Labs	FPS 2000 Digital Speakers	0BC	Mattel Interactive	Harpoon 4	220-221
Deil Computer Corp.	Systems	1BC	Mattel Interactive	Real Myst	242-243
Earthlink Network	Earthlink Network	43	Microsoft	Midtown Madness 2	17
Eidos Interactive	Project IGI	18-19	Microsoft	Sidewinder - Gamevoic	36-37
Eidos Interactive	Timeline	25	Microsoft	Motorcross Madness 2	40
Eidos Interactive	Tomb Raider 5	162-163	Microsoft	Metal Gear Solid	71
Electronic Arts	NHL 2001	134-135	Microsoft	Combat Flight Simulator 2	94-95
Electronic Arts	Alice	238-239	Microsoft	Sidewinder - Force Feedback 2	121
Electronic Arts	EMPEROR: Battle of Dune	60-61	Microsoft	Links 2001	129
Electronic Arts	Red Alert 2	78-79	Microsoft	Mech Warrior 4	142-143
Electronics Boutique	EB World	76-77	Microsoft	Crimson Skies	215
Falcon Northwest Computer Systems	Gaming Systems	216	Microsoft	Sidewinder Strategic Commander	230-231
Firstlook.com	www.firstlook.com	23	Microsoft	Age of Empires 2	240-241
Fox Interactive	No One Lives Forever	22	Microsoft	Game Commander	212
Fox Interactive	Sanity	90-91	Mind Maker	MPlayer.com	126
Gathering of Developers	Rune	44-45	MPlayer.com	Catechumen	229
Gathering of Developers	Blair Witch	49, 51, 53, 55	NLightening Software	Delta Force Land Warrior	74-75
Greenbay CD Rom	Marketplace	253	Nova Logic	Conspiracies	99
Harman Multimedia	Speakers	4-5	Proto Storm	Freedom: First Resistance	54
Havas Interactive	Zeus	1FC-1	Red Storm Entertainment	Cyborg 3D	199
Havas Interactive	Empire Earth	6-7	Saitek	Everquest: Scars of Velious	62-63
Havas Interactive	SWAT 3 Elite Edition	34-35	Sony Online Ent.	WOW Thing	251
Havas Interactive	You Don't Know Jack	87	SRS Labs, Inc.	Sheep	15
Havas Interactive	Tribes 2	100-101	TalonSoft	Evil Dead	92-93
Havas Interactive	Gunman	110-111	THQ	Stupid Invaders	219
Havas Interactive	Ground Control	112-113	Ubisoft		
Havas Interactive	Half-Life Counter-Strike	114-115	Univ. of Advancing Computer Techn.	Distance Education	253
			VERITAS Software	Groove	29
			XiCat	Carneggedon	68
			XiCat	X Plane	209

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Creator of *Total Annihilation* for Cavedog, officially the industry's most enthusiastic sales person of his own game, and now heading up Gas Powered Games' development of *Dungeon Siege*, Chris Taylor needs to be asked the dumb Backspace questions. *Voilà*, as the French might say...

Chris Taylor

How the devil are you?

I am feeling so damn great right now, it is simply beyond explanation. Okay, it's the crack... can I have your TV?

What's the best game you've played recently?

Age of Empires II: The Conquerors.

What's it like being in the middle of a development cycle?

It's a great place to be, but it's also somewhat painful. We have come a long way and accomplished a lot, but the biggest challenges still lay ahead, and surely someone is going to lose their freakin' mind before then. We all wear bullet-proof T-shirts here at GPG, standard issue.

What's the worst game you've ever been involved in making?

It would have to be Bill Elliott's *NASCAR Challenge* for the Macintosh. I spent a short time in management as a "Development Producer," and this was dropped in my lap as the project that wouldn't ship. It's months late, they told me — get the darn thing out the door!

When was the last time a computer game drove you to the brink of madness?

1988 — And I am still a little insane from that incident. So much, in fact, that my therapist refuses to let me discuss it publicly.

What's the greatest moment in the history of gaming?

That would be the invention of the CRT. Computer games really sucked before that... when you had to wait for the Teletype to tell you whether you hit the alien mother-ship

(or not) with your super missile. But! Mike [a senior engineer at GPG] just walked into my office and insists that it's the Donkey Kong.

Ed Fries, Chris Roberts, Bruce Shelley, Alex Garden, and Chris Taylor are set at a table during Microsoft's Gamestock 2000. Who's the odd one out, and why?

Is this a trick question? I thought it might be. Ummm, Ed, because he writes the checks and the rest of us spend the money. [Hay Ed, if you are reading this and are even slightly offended that I chose you, I am just kidding, I love you man, you are the greatest. Kiss, kiss, smooch, kiss, etc.]

How many times have you been arrested?

Never, but I got a speeding ticket on Friday, I was doing 38 in a 25mph zone. \$100 fine. Shame on me — I'll never do it again, I promise.

What's the best (printable) joke you've heard in the last week or two?

Printable? Hell, we don't tell printable jokes here at GPG.

Violence in gaming: legitimate concern or media hysteria?

I think it's legitimate, but beating the crap out of the video games industry when TV has been shooting people in the head for years now is unfair. We all need to be responsible and do our part. Cue the national anthem!

What do you have in your pockets right now?

6 bucks (not anymore, since I took it out to count it).

What one thing would you take with you to a Survivor Island?

I would probably just have a tattoo on my arm that reminded me that every ridiculous thing I say is going to be aired on national television... and that when I sink to new lows of depravity, the ratings are going to shoot through the roof. This would, of course, have to be a constant state of internal conflict wondering if I was going to ruin my future movie career or not. Or maybe I would just take a can of baked beans; I love beans you know... I love 'em. That reminds me, what's Vederman up to these days?

Don't ask. Online gaming: over-rated fad or inexorable future?

Inexorable future! And it is now obvious to me that magazine people know cooler words than game development people. Way to obfuscate the questions!

What game do you really wish somebody would make?

That's easy... a game about love... okay, who's kidding who here? I'm neurotic, crack out the sub-machine guns, everybody's getting a lead sandwich! Yee haaaa!

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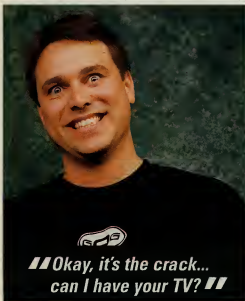
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